

STOCK CINEMA

NUMBER 6

\$4 (\$5 - overseas)



Your Guide to Cult Movies,
Arthouse Oddities,
Drive-In Swill, and
Underground Obscurities!!



EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS: Welcome to SHOCK CINEMA #6, the review-zine devoted to the strangest niches of film & video—whether it has a big, bloated budget or was paid for by the filmmaker's day job at Pizza Hut. In other words, we cover anything that's weird, strange, or worth a drunken laugh. I hope you enjoy this new edition as much as I enjoyed viewing all this cinematic nonsense, usually awakening the next morning surrounded by empty bottles and overflowing ashtrays. It's been 14 months since my last outpouring (yes, I've gotten all your letters, telling me to get my fuckin' ass in gear) and this turned out to be the biggest issue yet. I hope the additional pages make up for my "erratic" publication schedule. Sure, I'm a lazy bastard, but I'm also trying to cut back on my misanthropic side. The more time I spend prowling the bars and streets, enjoying this beloved cesspool of New York City, the less I have to sit in my skanky apartment, watching movies, belching out reviews, and listening to neighbors blasting the Home Shopping Network at 5 a.m.

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY / BACK ISSUES: Veterans of SHOCK CINEMA know that I'm barely able to get one issue out every year. THIS is your dose for '94, so read it slowly. If you want to be assured of receiving the next edition (whenever the hell I get around to it), you can send cash, check or money order (payable to me, NOT the mag) and I'll put you on my mailing list...And though I'm aware some folks like to have complete sets of magazines, there's no use in asking for #1,2 or 3. There's gone. I still have a few copies of SHOCK CINEMA #4 and 5, and they're still \$4 apiece (postpaid). All the address info is on this page, inside the box in the upper right corner.

But enough generic info already...In my last editorial, I bitched about how the 'zine scene seemed to be sliding into the abyss—how the smart editors had given up on the whole damned thing, and the even smarter ones cashed it in for a quick buck. And BOY did I get a lot of shit for that remark! It still amazes me how one drunken jerk cranking out a home-made 'zine can piss off so many people! It's not as if this puny li'l 3000-copy mag actually has any weight in the larger scheme of reality. It's just a fuckin' opinion, and if you can't take a little criticism, you'll never survive in the real world...Come to think of it, when it comes to almost every film magazine in existence (whether we're talking about glossy ass-kissers like PREMIERE or any Xeroxed-on-your-Bosses'-Copy-Machine newsletter), you, the much-appreciated Reader, shouldn't believe a goddamn thing we say. Whether it comes to art, music, film, whatever, you have to remember that critics are nothing but barnacles—pasty li'l parasites sucking off the vision (or in most cases, lack of vision) of someone else. There are only two reasons for you to pick up any of these mags (including the one you've got clutched in your sweaty li'l paws). First, to get info on films you never knew existed, so you can track 'em down, watch 'em, and make your own judgement. And second, to get a little entertainment out of its style—whether it's the writers' insights, lack of insights, or simple bone-headed humor. BUT FOR GOD'S SAKE, DON'T BELIEVE US! We're just one more asshole with an opinion (albeit one with enough cash to publish a 'zine). For the most part, fanzines are your most honest forum, because we have so little to gain from sucking up (What do we get? A free video? Big fucking deal). But as you go up the corporate ladder, you'll see a money-making agenda—and if you listen carefully, you'll hear assholes getting tongue-cleansed from here to California. Don't fall for it, my friend. Get your own opinions, stick with 'em, and get royally pissed off when others tell you that *you're* the one who's wrong. There are too many lemmings in this world as it is, and we don't need any more.

In particular, New York City seems to breed this brand of horseshit. Some days it seems like one big asshole magnet—packed with whiny poseurs and "unrecognized geniuses". But there are a lot of wonderful things about the place too. The music scene (despite the

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All opinions, reviews, rants and random bitchin' are by Steve Puchalski, unless otherwise noted.

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fact you have to pay an arm and a leg to see even the most obscure local band), first run movies (complete with lines 'round the block), and great food (if you wanna be crammed into a tiny table, have some snotty waiter ignore you, and then pay twenty bucks for a plate of pasta you could fix at home for 50 cents). Best of all, I only have to walk half a block to buy a six pack at any time of the day or night...Excuse me if I bitch a bit, but this was a particularly nasty winter—trapped in an apartment where, three years after moving in, I'm still finding pieces of broken crack vials from the previous tenant. Now that this issue is done, I just wanna jump in a car and hit the road at 80 m.p.h. (in Manhattan, only cab drivers are allowed to run Broadway at that speed), find some green grass (the legit kind), and pass out with a cold beer and a warm friend. Instead of drinking too much and invariably grieving the past. Stumbling to the bathroom, hacking up all my stomach has to offer, and falling back to sleep on a mattress laced with old lovers. Knowing full well that if I hadn't had my heart once again torn from my chest, I never would have had all the free time to pump out this issue of SHOCK CINEMA. Ahhh, the life of a happy bachelor...Then again, I truly love this fucked-up city. Because, despite it all the chaos, the place still survives and thrives.

But enough of my brilliant (yeah, right) observations on life, happiness and general nausea. Because on the film front, some cool tidbits have crawled from beneath the avalanche of corporate pabulum. Americans are finally getting turned onto the joys of Asian cinema, which is much more than just John Woo ammo-fests. Heading south of the border, Jose Mojica Marins' incredible Coffin Joe movies are finally available thanks to Something Weird Video. Film Threat is pumping out their line of indie productions, and bootleg video distributors (shhhh...you never know who's gonna turn you in) have been locating incredible, obscure stuff (as you'll see by the contents of this issue)...But one quick word about the touchy subject of bootlegging. Before purchasing any second-rate, mail-order videos—especially by underground filmmakers—try to find a legit distributor that'll actually funnel some of your cash back to the artist. It might take a little extra effort on your part, but considering how strapped many up-and-coming auteurs are, I'm sure they'll appreciate the fact they won't have to sell another pint of plasma that week to pay the rent.

Hell, I think it's time I get outta here, and let you get onto business. I need some fresh air. Don't wait up. 4/23/94

FILM FLOTSAM : Readers' Recommendations

TRISTER KEANE; New York City.

SIR HENRY AT RAWLINSON END (1980). Based on Vivian (Bonzo Dog Band) Stanshall's original story (plus subsequent Radio 4 and album sketches), Trevor Howard is riotous as the drunken, insane Sir Henry, holed up in his mansion littered with leftover food and empty

bottles. The loose-knit comic plot has Sir Henry exorcising his brother's ghost (Viv), who was killed while wearing no trousers and must be re-pants'd in order to find peace. But the movie's main joy lies in the verbal bantering and barrage of non sequiturs and cheap puns. Not to mention the frighteningly accurate visual realization of Sir Henry's nightmarish lifestyle.

HOT TOMORROWS (1978). Before becoming just another hack with dreck like SCENT OF A WOMAN and BEVERLY HILLS COP, director Martin Brest made this eccentric first feature for only \$30,000. A b&w mood piece featuring a frustrated writer and his best friend (Ken Lerner and Ray Sharkey), driving around Hollywood on Christmas Eve. A downbeat, rambling movie in which nothing much really happens—so I guess it's technically an "art film", eh? But also pocked with humorously

THE SIR HENRY PRINCIPLE:

ON THE VIRTUE OF THRIFT:

"If I had all the money I'd spent on drink... I'd spend it on drink."

ON THE VISITS TO THE WC:

"Generally when I've eaten something I don't want to see it again."

ON POLITE DEBATE:

"If I want your opinion, I'll thrash it out of you."

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ously bizarre episodes like a visit to a mortuary. Co-starring Herve Villechaize and produced by the American Film Institute.

COMING APART (1969). A few decades back, Rip Torn was one of the coolest actors around, putting his neck on the chopping block in low-budget, high-weirdness roles (TROPIC OF CANCER, PAY-DAY), in addition to being Dennis Hopper's first choice to play the Nicholson role in EASY RIDER. Even if this movie's a mess, it's a wonderful mess, with Rip playing a psycho psychiatrist who secretly films his encounters with the opposite sex. Filmed to simulate raw, home movie footage, it was rated X and features plenty of neurotic N.Y.C. characters and pretentious shenanigans. Not to mention Torn getting a blowjob from Sally Kirkland. Director Milton Moses Ginsberg would later make THE WEREWOLF OF WASHINGTON.

THE LAST WOMAN (1974). The French sure know how to have a good time, especially when it comes to fucked-up romances! Gerard Depardieu stars as a sexist lout whose wife walks out and leaves him to his assorted mistresses. But when sultry Ornella Muti enters his life, Gerard's outmoded values are put to the test. And when she accuses the lug of being nothing without his penis, his only way to prove her wrong is to hack off his dick with an electric carving knife. Rated X, and oh, did I forget to mention that it's a wicked comedy? Two decades ago, Depardieu was the most daring actor on the planet. Now the fat frog rakes in millions with Disney swill like MY FATHER, THE HERO. Hell, I'd take the money too.

DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVEN STREET (1972). If you loved Sam

Fuller's crazed duet of SHOCK CORRIDOR and THE NAKED KISS, this pic will blow the back of your head off. Fuller has a field day sending up Euro-crime thrillers when Glenn Corbett journeys to Germany to track down his partner's killer and finds himself ass-deep in drugs, pornography, blackmail, and music by Can. The acting is stilted (with Christa Lang, a.k.a. Mrs. Fuller, once again validating the Fifth Celluloid Commandment, "Thou shalt not put thy wife in thine own movie."), but Fuller is at the top of his form, piling on the in-jokes and blowing a big, juicy raspberry at coherency. One of his best.

LOVE AND MONEY (1980). This is a terrible movie, full of macho posing and unintentional laughs. But any film by James Toback is worth a look. Perpetual whacko Ray Sharkey is recruited by multi-billionaire Klaus Kinski (!!) to sway the opinion of a Latin American dictator (Armand Assante) who used to be Sharkey's old college roommate—while taking time out to put the moves on Kinski's missus, Euro-babe Ornella Muti. This script continually pegs the Absurdity Meter, such as when Muti has to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" in order to get the impotent Sharkey hard, but Toback dives into his material head first (never realizing his pool's only a foot deep).

Lie for her...cheat for her...kill for her...die for her.



ASA THE CHESSPLAYER; New York City.

Dear SHOCK CINEMA readers,

Your veteran reviewer, "Asa The Chessplayer," has been hunting down top-rated sleaze rarities from all over the world. The following three films are the very best of their genre.

FLAVIA - PRIESTESS OF VIOLENCE, directed by Gianfranco Mingozzi, is a lavish and colorful Italian production. Supposedly based on a true story, the film covers an interesting historical period. The evils of the world are witnessed by a young nun, Flavia, who soon

rebels. Scenes of brutal torture, murder, rape and carnage, wild sex orgies, and sacrilegious imagery, however, stamp FLAVIA as the ultimate exploitation film! See sin in the convent, rape in a pig sty, impalement of the enemy (in the Dracula legend tradition), and a girl crawling onto a hanging beef carcass! Florinda Bolkan as Flavia doesn't have much of a body (the rest of the cast makes up for it though), but those eyes! That cat-like face! That voice trembling with emotion! You will never forget FLAVIA!

BLOODY JUDGE, NIGHT OF THE BLOOD MONSTER, THRONE OF BLOOD, and several other titles in various languages---it's all the same film!!! The story of the brutal Judge Jeffries (Christopher Lee) featuring an all-star cast, including Maria Schell, Maria Rohm and Leo Genn. Directed by Jess Franco---one of his best efforts, the film features excellent acting, great color, music, battle scenes and high human emotion. Howard Vernon, as the torturer-executioner reminds one of Boris Karloff at his best---for exotic effect he speaks French in the English version! The best version is the German HEXENTOTER VON BLACKMOOR which contains nude scenes censored in the others, plus more dungeon action. Rumor has it that Christopher Lee would not do sex scenes---so we see the gorgeous Maria Rohm being caressed by a seemingly detached hand---with a highly erotic result! Will justice triumph in the end? Will the virtuous escape while the evil-doers are destroyed? You be the JUDGE!

LOVE CAMP 27, an Italian production directed by Mario Caino, is the best of the Nazi Camp films. Good production values, authentic war footage, and a believable storyline separates #27 from other "Camps". There are no half-human monsters or horrible experiments, but lots of sex (including two brutal hardcore scenes) and high human drama. Sirpa Lane (the girl in Borowczyk's THE BEAST) gives a performance which transcends the rough material of this genre. A prisoner in rags, Sirpa is taken in by the sadomasochistic camp commander. It looked like things would really heat up when he introduced her to his pet German Shepherd, but unfortunately they didn't get along too well! Later, now dressed in gowns and jewels, Sirpa warbles a song in the best Garbo-Dietrich tradition. Alas, the trauma of her experiences proves too much for our heroine, and the tragic ending is no surprise.

Miles Wood; London, England.

HOLD ON...IT'S THE DAVE CLARK FIVE (1968). A few years back I couldn't have cared less about the Dave Clark Five (some insignificant '60s beat group) but then I caught John Boorman's debut feature CATCH US IF YOU CAN, with its melancholy take on the Swinging Sixties a stark contrast to Dick Lester's Beatles flicks, and noticed Clark penned a few decent tunes (including one---"When"---bona fide classic). Therefore, I eagerly tuned in for an after-midnight TV screening [following James Whale's FRANKENSTEIN of all things] of the (apparently) award winning HOLD ON, written, produced and directed by Clark, which in many respects looks suspiciously like a try-out for a possible series (a la THE MONKEES) but in truth more resembles Bob Rafelson's HEAD (rather than the more sanitized TV version), and its more outre aspect---for example, when the group visit a health club the camera is positioned about one inch from the obvious endowments of the buxom attendant---make me wonder if it ever got aired. Highlights include Richard Chamberlain remarking that he'd rather be a photographer than a TV doctor because they get to spend time with beautiful women, then finding himself in a sketch that brings BLOW UP to mind; interesting use of stock footage; and the band performing accompanied by some go-go dancers really giving it their all. Certainly puts most current music videos to shame.

GHOST STORY [a.k.a. ASYLUM OF BLOOD and MADHOUSE MANSION] (1974). Stephen Weeks took time out from endlessly making and remaking the legend of GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT to direct this shot-in-India excursion in M.R.James territory about a trio of Englishmen spending a holiday in a supposedly haunted mansion, one of whom, Talbot, becomes plagued by events

from forty years before. The awkward overacting and the presence of Marianne Faithfull, along with the asylum scenes, suggest an attempt to replicate Ken Russell's then-successful overblown melodramas, but Weeks' film is actually a far more restrained, understated effort; the fact that unexplained occurrences only happen after Talbot has picked up a James book for bedside reading suggests a more psychological explanation to the events. While the film is never really frightening---the doll is an especially lame effect---it presents a refreshing change from the majority of horror product being churned out by the like of Tyburn and Amicus at that time, and strangely predates Stanley Kubrick's THE SHINING by over half a decade.



BEWITCHED (1945). Arch Obeler's brisk MGM B-pic prefigured THE THREE FACES OF EVE by 12 years. Soft-spoken psychologist (Edmund Gwenn) tells the strange story of Joan, a seemingly normal young woman who suddenly hears a voice inside her head telling her that another person, Karen, is living inside her body. Frightened, she runs away from her family and fiancée to New York; when her fiancée catches up with her the voice tells her to kill him, and in a great scene she stabs him in the back. She is defended in court by a lawyer who has fallen in love with her after seeing her working in a cigar store stand, but just before the jury is about to deliver the verdict---Not Guilty!--she screams out that she did it. The lawyer then enlists Gwenn's aid to try and save her. Scripted like an episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE, the film is elevated to another level by some moody chiaroscuro lighting, some economical and effective montages, and Obeler's directorial flourishes and compositions. Attractive Phyllis Thaxter is fine as the confused Joan, but then loses it in the extraordinary climax in which Gwenn exorcises Karen!

NOCTURNE. After the death of her mother, Marguerite (Lisa Eichorn) returns home and recalls her childhood days with her emotionally repressed mother and her young female tutor. Meanwhile, two lesbian hitchhikers [two of the most irritating characters I've ever witnessed] arrive seeking shelter from the rain after the car they stole broke down. Marguerite lets them stay and the three begin playing "games". The situation is the perfect set-up for a sexploitation pot boiler, unfortunately this supposedly serious drama (made for Britain's Channel 4 but given a brief theatrical run as a support) is basically an hour-long tease, afraid to let rip. Eichorn was predicted a future star after the brilliant CUTTER'S WAY, but was reduced to such low grade fare as HELLCAMP and supposed worthy causes (the crew is almost entirely female) as this. I'm not sure which is worse.

SHOCK CINEMA's FOUR-STAR FAVORITES

After a number of requests, here's a run-down of 50 (or so) SHOCK CINEMA favorites which I've had the pleasure to cover over the last decade of 'zine writing. Of course, you'll immediately notice that many all time classics (such as TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, TAXI DRIVER and THE NUTTY PROFESSOR) are missing. That's because most people are already familiar with those comparatively mainstream masterworks. Instead, I give you some of the more obscure delights that have made wading through all the celluloid dreck worth the effort. Search them out A.S.A.P. and enjoy...

HEAD (1968). Let's begin with the most cleverly-executed masterpiece of the L.S.D. era. (Honest.) SHOCK C.'s all-time fave, and the pic I've witnessed in more diverse states of intoxication and brain-derangement than any other. The Monkees' one and only feature film, directed by Bob Rafelson and written (undoubtedly with the aid of heavy medication) by Jack Nicholson, it's a brilliant de-construction of the Monkeemania phenomenon, as well as a surreal, rapid-fire satire of American media as seen through an acid haze. Beginning with the Cathode Ray quartet's suicide plunge, we're taken on a stream-of-consciousness ride into the nature of Hollywood reality. Bizarre, self-mocking and featuring some of their best tunes.

DARKTOWN STRUTTERS [a.k.a. Get Down and Boogie] (1974). A brain-damaging fave. This blaxploitation/musical/comedy/biker movie is unapologetically surreal and stooopid, featuring a female motorcycle gang decked out in threads that would've given Liberace

wet dreams. Searching for the leader's missing mom, these femmes encounter cycle-straddling KKK'ers in red leather hip boots, a Colonel Sanders look-a-like who's into cloning, plus more watermelon 'n' ribs jokes than you'll believe. Kudos to whacked scripter George Armistead (MIAMI BLUES) and set designer Jack Fisk, who mixes Willy Wonka with Ken Russell.

THE SADIST (1963). Arch Hall Jr. (who normally plays goody-goody dorks) shatters all previous conceptions as giggling thrill-killer Charley Tibbs—one of the nastiest nutcases in screen history. Accompanied by a wrap-around teen-aged tease, this Charlie Starkweather-styled sadist is in the midst of a multi-state murder spree when he runs into a trio of mild-mannered school teachers at an isolated gas station and proceeds to terrorize them for the remaining hour. Director James Landis ladles on the violence and anti-social behaviour, while pushing the '60s envelope for on-screen bloodshed. An early classic in Psycho Cinema!

BRAIN DAMAGE (1987). Frank Henenlotter's follow-up to his superb BASKET CASE shoots high and succeeds brilliantly. The star of this sleazefest is Aylmer, a slug-like talking parasite (voice courtesy of Zacherle) who convinces average-joe Rick Herbst to be his host body. After injecting a blue fluid into the back of Rick's neck, the guy trips his face off and allows Aylmer to live inside his body and kill others in order to feed off their brains. Crammed with gratuitous violence, sicko humor, cool visuals, plus be sure to search out the uncut version, which includes the infamous blowjob scene.

SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG (1971). The ultimate Kill-Whitey film! Top-notch art-sleaze, written, directed, produced, and starring Melvin Van Peebles (Mario's

MUCH more talented pop). Sweetback is a black stud who bashes in a cop's brains and is chased through the alleyways of Ghettoville U.S.A. by the neo-Nazi, white pigs. This is one fuckin' angry movie, packed with sadism and pretentiousness, and rated X when first released ("by an all-white jury"). Though an unholy mess, it rips through the bullshit of urban life with a rage rarely seen on screen.

SWITCHBLADE SISTERS (1975). Director Jack Hill is surely one of the unsung geniuses of drive-in cinema. And this is THE definitive street-slut action epic, featuring trash temptresses Joanna Nail, Robbie Lee and Monica Gayle as hard-boiled members of The Dagger Debs, who dump their useless men and take over the town. It's non-stop action (complete with street rumbles, catfights, a juvie slammer, a roller-rink massacre, and even a dick chomping). Toss in polyester Tony Danza- clones, Black urban guerillas, and plenty of hot chicks with M-16's, and you have a skidrow masterpiece!

SONNY BOY (1992). What can you say about a movie that features David Carradine in drag throughout, and no one in the pic notices? Absolutely brilliant? Utterly twisted? Both. This tale of a kidnapped baby, whose tongue is cut out and raised like a rabid animal by the ultimate dysfunctional family (Papa Paul Smith, Mama Carradine and wacko Uncle Brad Dourif) is a cross between RAISING ARIZONA and TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE. When is director Robert Martin Carroll going to make another film? I'll be first in line.

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS (1968). When it comes to Godzilla movies, it's difficult to pick the best (since I love 'em all, even the ones that suck). This city-stomping creature feature is Rubber-Monster-Mayhem at its best! Set in the year 1999, we get ALL of Toho's incredible menagerie in one movie! Godzilla, Mothra, Rodan, Baragon, Ghidrah, even Godzilla's annoying lil' rugrat, Minyah. After laying waste to the capitals of the world, they spend the rest of the movie crippling each other on Monster Island. It's constant, wholesale destruction, and wild fun for kids and drunk adults alike!

THE WIZARD OF GORE (1970). We all know that Herschell Gordon Lewis is one of the first maestros of cine-malignance, and this pic combines his butcherblock effects with his coolest concept. Ray Sager is hilarious as Montag the Magnificent, a magician whose 'tricks' involve eviscerating female volunteers, taking a punch press to rib cages, and turning faces into "human ravioli". But though his assistants look fine when they leave the stage, they tend to fall apart (literally) hours later. Oops. Lewis lingers lovingly on all the gore 'n' goopy organs, and the end is a trippy mindfuck when Montag goes network. A landmark in gross-out dementia.

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A BUCKET OF BLOOD (1959). Without question, this is Roger Corman's finest film (even though it was shot in only five days). It's horrific, satirical and layered with subtext about Corman's own aspirations. Dick Miller is Walter Paisley, the ridiculed busboy at a beatnik coffeehouse, whose dream is to be an artist. Unfortunately, the guy's talentless. Fate plays a hand when Walter kills a cat, covers it with clay, entitles the work "Dead Cat", and is promptly acclaimed a genius by local Beats. Of course, then Walter has to move onto larger pieces, like "Murdered Man". Packed with enough hip slang and excruciating poetry to make you choke on your espresso.

LOVE IS A DOG FROM HELL (1987). Directed by Belgian Dominique Deruddere, this drama blends a trio of stories by the late, great Charles Bukowski into a heart-wrenching tale of sexual awakening, loneliness and true love. The film follows everyman Harry Voss through three stages of his life. First, as an infatuated 12-year-old. Then as a severely acne-scarred 19-year-old. And finally, as an alcoholic adult who finally finds the woman of his dream in the form of an angelic (albeit stolen) corpse. Impeccably directed and without a hint of pathos, this is a masterpiece of truth, despair and the unexpected forms love can take. The perfect double bill with *BARFLY*.

BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS (1970). Russ Meyer's crowning achievement. Though low on the T&A which professional bishop-whackers have come to expect from the King of the D-Cup, this psychedelic soap opera (penned by professional lard ass Roger Ebert) leaves no trendy cliché untouched. Russ follows a femme rock band from senior proms to the top of the charts and the warped decadence of California—packing the rapid-fire proceedings with dope, acid, nymphos, swinging parties, pregnancies, suicide attempts, pervers, death, and medical miracles. A celluloid hallucination so fiercely photographed and edited it'll singe your eyeballs.

PSYCHOPATH (1972). This terribly-made movie has an incredible concept and an ultra-creepy star turn from Tom Basham, who plays crazed TV Kids Show host Mr. Rabbey. After meeting one too many battered children, Rabbey burns out a bearing and begins slaughtering abusive parents! The violence is tame, the message heavy-handed, but I forgive its flaws, since this is a rare horror movie where you can cheer the killer. Rabbey's a cross between Pee Wee Herman and Norman Bates, peddling around on his cool bike, babbling to his puppet pals, and even running over a Bad Mommy's head with a lawnmower! A guilty pleasure.

SCORPIO RISING (1962-64). One of the coolest underground shorts ever made. Kenneth Anger mythologizes the biker lifestyle (years before Hollywood discovered its commercial possibilities) in a quasi-documentary that combines motorcycle gang footage with songs like "I Will Follow Him" and "Blue Velvet" (pre-dating MTV-style videos by two decades). As the bikers go through their pre-battle rituals, Anger intercuts clips of Brando, James Dean and Jesus Christ (ripped off from some cheapjack Sunday School flick), while accentuating the violence, idolatry and homoerotic nature of their fellowship. Without question his most accessible work.

RAT PFINK A BOO BOO (1966). There's is NO WAY to adequately describe this Ray Dennis Steckler jaw-droppingly-incompetent gem. A glorified home movie featuring crime fighting cretins Rat Pfink and Boo Boo (a Batman and Robin rip-off, in wool ski masks and ill-fitting long underwear), who don't even officially show up until halfway through the movie. After a

half-hour b&w intro of pool parties and inane rock 'n' roll, two characters suddenly walk into a closet and emerge as our costumed clods (complete with tinted photography) in order to save a kidnapped beauty. Unbelievably surreal and one-of-a-kind (thank god). Plus, be sure to check out Steckler's legitimately good films, like *THE THRILL KILLERS* and *SINTHIA*.



OUT OF THE BLUE (1981). Needing some fast cash during his lean years, a pre-detox Dennis Hopper signed onto a Canadian domestic drama. But when the director quit, Hopper took over the reins, rewrote the entire script, and came up with an urgent, nihilistic masterwork. This glimpse into family dysfunction features Hopper as an alcoholic, ex-jailbird father; Sharon Farrell as a slutty mom; and Linda Manz as a 14-year-old rebel who likes hitchhiking, grass and dead rock stars. This is a truly nasty pic, full of twisted family ties, seedy realism and dead end despair. After watching this rancid gem,

you'll want to kick Hopper in the head for wasting his talent on shit like *SUPER MARIO BROTHERS*.

PRIVATE PARTS (1972). Long before *EATING RAOUL*, Paul Bartel made this ultra-kinky thriller for MGM (who wouldn't even put their logo on it). The tale follows a naive, teenage runaway (Ann Ruyman) who hides out at her Aunt's skid row hotel and discovers the wonderful world of sexual deviance. There's a crazed killer on the premises too, but Bartel seems more interested in observing the hotel's voyeurs, drunks and pervers—my fave being a leather fetish minister whose bedroom features a life-size Christ, swaddled in motorcycle chains! A brilliant, unsettling ride into Raunchville, perfectly capturing the creepiness of lowlife hotels and the allure of their twisted fantasies.

THE EXECUTIONER (1981). Director/star Dominic Miceli (a.k.a. Duke Mitchell, the Dean Martin clone from *BELA LUGOSI MEETS A BROOKLYN GORILLA*) brings us the most unintentionally hilarious tale of Mafia mayhem ever! Dom stars as

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Mimi, who takes over the mob with a barrage of bloodshed, extortion, murder, and extended monologues about the suffering of the Sicilian people (sniff, sniff). And any film with over a dozen murders in the first five minutes is a gem! Don't forget the groanable songs written by Micelli himself. Strives for the scope of *THE GODFATHER*, with a budget less than what Coppola spent on Brando's cannolis.

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN (1973). Alexandro Jodorowsky's most daring film, and well as *THE CELLULOID MIND-ROASTER* of all time! An epic hallucination crawling with wall-to-wall mega-weirdness, in which Christ, The White Master (Alex), and a pack of symbolic thieves (each named after a planet, and each representing a different ill of society) plan to raid The Holy Mountain and steal its secrets. This pic would cost a billion dollars to make nowadays, and its first half hour of in-your-face imagery (crucified animals; storm troopers; cripples; flowers blooming from stigmata; exploding toads) is like prime Fellini on *really* prime peyote. Outrageous, pretentious, unbelievable, and unforgettable. There'll never be another film remotely like it!

BAD TIMING: A SENSUAL OBSESSION (1980). One of the most unrelentingly grim films ever made about the "joys" of love. Nicolas Roeg's psycho-sexual tale uses a fragmented narrative structure to show us the dysfunctional (to put it mildly) relationship between womanizing louse Art Garfunkel and slutty, self-destructive Teresa Russell. From their first steamy encounter to the sick suicide/finale, Roeg pours on the liquor, pills, and emotional manipulation posing as love. In other words, this is NOT a good Date Film. Though Roeg's obtuse eye almost overpowers the characters, it's a sleazeball, arthouse masterwork! Co-starring Harvey Keitel, who's drawn to these type of obsessive dramas like a fly to shit.

THE WILD ANGELS (1966). Corman's biker drama is one of the first and best for anti-social, nihilistic fun. No staid moralizing here, because this dirtbag cycle gang simply wants "to ride our machines without getting hassled by The Man." Adding, "and we wanna get loaded." Peter Fonda, Bruce Dern, Diane Ladd and (groan) Nancy Sinatra star, and when first released, this unapologetic vision kicked middle Amerika in the ass. Best sequence: A biker funeral, complete with cheap wine, bongos, the corpse with a joint in his mouth, and the widow raped behind the pulpit. Often copied, but never equalled.

HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD (1976). First-timers Joe Dante and Allan Arkush were given \$60,000 bucks, a ten-day shooting schedule and all the old New World film clips they could splice together. This savvy, in-joke gem is the result—a masterpiece for drive-in fanatics. Candice Rialson (sigh) is a naive starlet who links up with Miracle Pictures ("If it's a good picture, it's a Miracle"), along with Mary Woronov, Paul Bartel and Dick Miller. A backhanded tribute to Tinseltown's Z-grade moviemakers, complete with murders, maidens, and (intentionally over-the-top) melodrama.

COMBAT SHOCK (1984). One of the ugliest, nastiest, most depressing movies of the decade. Is it any wonder I love it?! A labor of twisted love from director Buddy Giovinazzo, it features a down-and-out vet and his pathetic, urban cesspool existence. No job. No money. Beaten by street thugs. Accosted by junkie pals. Waiting in employment lines. Roaming skidrow streets. Dealing with his shrewish wife and ERASERHEAD-esque mutant baby. Not to mention his graphic Nam flashbacks, complete with P.O.W. torture. The tone alternates between hallucinatory psychosis and a reality so grim that you'll wanna open your own wrists. Spectacularly rancid!

SQUEAL OF DEATH (1986). If you enjoyed Alex Winter and Tom Stern's feature debut, *FREAKED* (and you'd have to be an idiot not to), you'll piss all over yourself during this short student film, perpetrated by these two madmen-in-training. It's a Tex Avery cartoon come to life (on a ten-dollar budget), telling the tall tale of the most asinine crime spree in history. Winter stars as Howie, a sniveling moron whose screwy family leads him to a life of ridiculously anti-social tendencies. Crammed with crass, cheap humor, this "rebel without a clue" is a solid chunk of underground dementia.

CANDY (1968). An all-star embarrassment, as well as one of the most splendidly extravagant dosed-up comedies ever made—a true artifact of the late '60s. Ewa Aulin stars as Candy, a doe-eyed, micro-skirted innocent who takes a cosmic journey into her own sexuality along with guest stars Marlon Brando, Richard Burton, Ringo Starr, Walter Matthau, John Astin, James Coburn, and John Huston. Utterly ridiculous and pretentious, but director Christian Marquand knows he'll never get another chance to direct a movie after this mess, so he decides to gamble it all—achieving a rare self-awareness of just how goofy the entire overwrought enterprise is.



STREET TRASH (1987). Set amidst the urban blight of Brooklyn, this is one of the funniest, most excessive horror flicks of the '80s. Director Jim Muro subjects us to decapitations, burnings, stabbings, rape, necrophilia, and a game of Keep Away featuring a hacked-off penis. In addition to assorted derelicts, cops and killers, a liquor store is selling a rotgut named Viper, which instantly turns the clientele into Incredible Melting Winos! Heads drip, limbs decompose, torsos explode, and it's lovingly lensed for maximum disgust. Acting honors go to James Lorinz (*FRANKENHOOKER*) as a snotty doorman.

CREATION OF THE HUMANOIDS (1962). This early futuristic parable tackles *BLADE RUNNER*'s themes with a \$1.98 budget. Set after World War III, in a society comprised of aristocratic humans and "clickers" (pale humanoid robots who now make up the workforce), a Gestapo-like group goes ballistic when the subservient machines decide to better themselves. Almost totally devoid of action, but incredibly imaginative and ahead of its time, the literate script delves into inter-species love, intolerance, robotic religion, not to mention the entire nature of what it really means to be human.

FORBIDDEN ZONE (1980). This b&w, low-budget fantasy is like a Max Fleischer cartoon come to life—with blatantly two-dimensional sets, over-sized props, and a wild, drug-soaked sensibility. When daughter Frenchy is kidnapped by King Fausto of the 6th Dimension (Herve Villechaize), the Hercules Family (accompanied by Squeezit the Chicken Boy) enter the Forbidden Zone to save her. Featuring human chandeliers, a torture chamber run by a topless princess, Susan Tyrell (always a hoot) as the Queen, the babbling Kipper Kids, plus Danny Elfman popping up as Satan and giving us a hellish rendition of "Minnie the Moocher". Weird beyond belief.

PRETTY POISON (1968). The perfect double bill with *HEATHERS*, this Middle American chiller features Anthony Perkins (in a relatively sympathetic role) and Tuesday Weld at her drop dead gorgeous, sex kitten finest. Perkins is trying to readjust to society after years of being institutionalized, when he links up with an alluring high school majorette (Tuesday...who else?). It's soon clear that Tuesday isn't as naive as Perkins first thought, when he finds himself in a suburban quagmire of murder and manipulation. Filled with unexpectedly dark humor, this still hasn't found the following it deserves.

RUBIN & ED (1993). The ultimate Crispin Glover movie. Period. In which rabid fans can watch The Weird One at his most extreme. Crispin gives an Oscar-caliber performance (yeah, right) as a long-haired dweeb whose '60s-throwback wardrobe includes plaid bellbottoms and immense platform shoes. His mission: To journey into the desert and bury his long-dead cat (which he's kept on ice), aided by unwilling salesman Howard Hesseman. Director Trent Harris gives us terrific sights, like Crispin drinking the melted ice water that his rotted cat has been floating in, and as comedy teams go, Hesseman & Glover are the Hope & Owsley of the '90s.

TOUGH GUYS DON'T DANCE (1987). A remarkable piece of hyper-pretentious trash. Director Norman Mailer turns his own book into a wildly overwrought thriller, with a script like a Gordian Knot and enough heavyhanded symbols to make David Lynch look like a neophyte. Ryan O'Neal stars (that's how wrongheaded it is) as a drifter involved with lost love, liquor and murder. Laced with absurd humor, quotable lines, plus incredible support from Lawrence Tierney as O'Neal's pop and Wings Hauser as a psycho sheriff. This flick is utterly ridiculous, as well as being one of my most beloved guilty pleasures.

SWEET SUGAR (1972). Still the best Women in Prison flick ever made, thanks in large part to ultra-hot Phyllis Davis, who's tossed into a foreign jail and forced to cut sugar cane, as all the men slobber. All the old clichés are present, but they're perpetrated with style and self-awareness this time around. And even though Davis models skimpy wardrobes throughout, she won't take any shit, even from the warden ("I hope someone hacks off your hambone," she snarls). Plenty of sadism and skin, but surprisingly non-misogynistic. Runner-up in the Babes Behind Bars Department: *THE BIG DOLL HOUSE*.

STALKER (1981). Try to catch this Russian science fiction epic on the big screen. Because watching Andrei Tarkovsky's 3-hour, post-apocalyptic vision on video would be akin to seeing 2001

on a 9" b&w television. Three men travel into The Zone, a government restricted area where the laws of nature have been twisted into a dreamlike state. This is a Journey Film where the cast never really knows where they're going, or what they'll do when they get there, and though some viewers will give up after the first reel, the more courageous (or stoned) will fall under its spell. Runner-up from Andrei: the equally long, but more slightly more accessible *SOLARIS*.



BLOOD FREAK (1974). There are plenty of bad movies. But every so often there comes a movie that's cosmically horrible. How else can you describe an inept, no-budget, anti-drug, pro-Christian monster movie that revels in gore and features a cast spawned from a century's worth of in-breeding? Director Steve Hawkes stars as a biker who smokes a laced joint, samples some experimental poultry, and promptly develops a taste for human blood and a ridiculous paper mache bird head. After savagely murdering the cast, he's finally saved by some "Faith in God" bullshit and a religious dish (subtly) named Angel. This film bites, but it's such a mind-roasting mix of genres that I'll never forget it.

END OF THE ROAD (1969). Director Aram Avakian twists John Barth's novel through a funhouse sensibility, and with the aid of always-whacked scripter Terry Southern, concocts a savagely comic look at alienation, insanity and middle-class mores. Stacy Keach stars as Jake Horner, who goes catatonic on a train platform and winds up at Dr. James Earl Jones' psycho-farm. There he's rehabilitated by way-too-modern methods and is sent back into the world, ready to disrupt the lives of a not-so-normal married couple. Indulgent, pitch-black, and one-of-a-kind, with superb Gordon Willis cinematography. For more Keach weirdness: *THE NINTH CONFIGURATION*.

APOCALYPSE POOH (1987). This is four-star guerilla filmmaking, and the funniest ten minutes of video I've ever seen. T. Graham had the revelation to take clips from Disney's Winnie the Pooh cartoons and then dub dialogue from *APOCALYPSE NOW* over it. The result is perfect, with Piglet transformed into Dennis Hopper's mind-blown journalist, Pooh pulled by a runaway kite to The Stones' "Satisfaction", and Tigger popping up for the "Fuckin' Tiger!" sequence. This is sheer brilliance, and I must have watched this tape at least twenty times. Also includes "Blue Peanuts" (Charlie Brown meets *BLUE VELVET*) and The Archies doing a Sex Pistols ditty.

THE FALLS (1980). Peter Greenaway has a rep of being one of the most visually dazzling, unapologetically pretentious directors on the planet. But wait until you see his first feature, which clocks in at nearly 3 1/2 hours and makes *THE COOK*, *THE THIEF*, *ET CETERA* seem as accessible as *The Frugal Gourmet*. This mock-documentary presents us with 92 short biogra-

Bitter days...Sweet nights



phies of average people affected by the V.U.E. (Violent Unknown Event)—a vague ecological upheaval that has something to do with ornithology and seems to be changing the entire nature of human civilization. Methodically constructed, frustrating as hell at times, but also strangely compelling for extremely intrepid filmgoers.

PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE (1974). Brian DePalma's rock musical/comedy/horror pastiche is so wickedly entertaining that it blows ROCKY HORROR (which came out a year later) to bits. A modern update of PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, with a disfigured composer's rock score stolen by evil record magnate Swan (part-time troll Paul Williams, who's terrific! Really). DePalma is at his most flamboyant, with split screens, Hitchcock homages (before DePalma's overuse turned 'em into "rip-offs"), prescient satires of music trends (glamrock, beach ballads, do-wop), and a high-tech take on Faust. Plus, Jessica Harper is bewitching as the object of everyone's obsession. DePalma runners-up: HOME MOVIES and HI, MOM.

THE MANIPULATOR (1971). Forget all those early Judy Garland films, because this is Mickey Rooney's wildest performance—an unforgettable tour de farce. Mickey stars as B.J. Lang, a crazy old fart who has delusions he's a famous movie director, and keeps Luana Anders a prisoner in his warehouse. While Luana pleads, Mickey gets to sing, dance, scream, wear rouge and lipstick, and romp about with a Cyrano nose in this hallucinogenic amalgam of SUNSET BOULEVARD and THE COLLECTOR. Director Yabo Yablonsky gives it a dizzying veneer, using every conceivable camera trick, and I'll bet you a sawbuck Mickey doesn't put this one on his resume.

FINGERS (1977). Now that Harvey Keitel is a hot property, people should check out this early, ultra-brutal pic from the ham-handed James Toback. Harvey plays a concert pianist who moonlights as a Mob debt collector, trying to juggle family responsibilities, his artistic career, and new squeeze Tisa Farrow. This isn't just some Scorsese wannabee though, because Toback leaves gritty reality at the door and adrenalizes his pic with unflinching violence, comic encounters, and over-the-top performances (especially Jim Brown). Only Toback would conceive of putting the joys of a prostate exam onto film, and I'm sure Quentin Tarantino "borrowed" much of his style from this pic.

THE TRIP (1967) and PSYCH-OUT (1968). I'm a sucker for kitsch psychedelia, and this is a dream double bill. Corman's THE TRIP stars drive-in rebel Peter Fonda as an L.S.D. novice. Dr. Bruce Dern doses the guy, and Fonda spends the movie trapped inside closets, staring into clothes driers, meeting freaky chicks, and frying his brain with enlightening, Felliniesque hallucinations. Aided by off-screen acidhead Dennis Hopper's on-screen support and Jack Nicholson's savvy script. Speaking of Jack, he's also the star of Richard Rush's PSYCH-OUT, which plops a creaky runaway teen tale into the middle of hippie Haight Ashbury. Laszlo Kovacs' camerawork captures the tripped-out era, the dialogue is pure camp, and it's worth a look just to see a ponytailed Nicholson jamming onstage with his band.

POSSESSION (1981). Andrzej Zulawski's apocalyptic vision of marital madness was hacked from two hours to 80 minutes for U.S. distribution, despite the fact Isabelle Adjani won the best actress prize at Cannes for her hysterical portrait of a woman dealing (badly) with a mental meltdown. Besides her spasms and catatonic trances, she attacks hubbie Sam Neill, slices herself up with knives, and gives birth to a tentacled creature in a subway tunnel. Then she takes her Carlos Rambaldi-built offspring home and has sex with it. This film is a primal scream brought to life. Disorienting, overwrought, emotionally scalding, and the perfect double bill with Polanski's REPULSION.

SPIDER BABY (1964). Director Jack Hill strikes again! This no-budget horrorama is laced with grim laughs, and features a fabulous performance from bloated Lon Chaney Jr., playing the chauffeur for a homicidal household. The family bloodline carries a rare disease which regresses their minds and slowly turns them into slobbering cannibals, with Chaney keeping the family curse under wraps, even though any visitors are killed off by the adult 'children' (including a

skinheaded Sid Haig and two sexy sisters who enjoy playing a deadly game of "Spider"). There's even a theme song sung by Lon!

INFRA-MAN (1975). This incredible Hong Kong fantasy from director Hua Shan kicks some serious rubber-monster ass! Silly as hell, horribly dubbed, and edited for U.S. release with a Weedeater, it's nevertheless one of the coolest monster-fests of all time. When an evil princess decides to conquer the human race, she sends her subterranean legion of mutants to the surface. The earth's saviour takes the form of Infra-Man, an Ultraman-esque kung fu do-goodnik who's half man, half machine. The fight scenes are endless, the costumes are hilarious (I particularly love the Slinky-Head Twins), and there ain't one iota of logic in the whole dopey enterprise. So grab a beer (O.K., make that a LOT of beer) and enjoy!



LET ME DIE A WOMAN (1979). Alternately disgusting, boring, sad, and unforgettable (no matter how hard you try), Doris Wishman's clinical documentary tell us everything we never wanted to know about Transsexuals. There are interviews, lectures, dramatizations, and (most importantly) plenty of big, bloody crotch operations. You'll be squirming during a penis removal, makeshift vagina close-ups, and a sex-change patient who tries out their new apparatus before its completely healed (ouch). The subjects look scared and nervous as they're stripped and probed like lab specimens, and this voyeuristic project is a grim, ugly ride into exploitation hell. I loved it!

SUPERSTAR: THE KAREN CARPENTER STORY (1988). Todd Haynes' home-made short looks at the life and death of pop princess Karen Carpenter. What makes this 45 minute excursion into soft rock and weight loss so memorable is that all the leads are portrayed by BARBIE DOLLS! It would've been easy to turn this into a spoof of the white-bred duet, but Todd plays it totally serious—following the dolls through record contracts, concerts, anorexia nervosa, and Ex-Lax addiction, while portraying Karen's life with more intelligence than any make-a-buck live-action movie possibly could. Underground brilliance, though difficult to locate since surviving-shitheel Richard Carpenter sued Haynes for using their tunes without permission.

VISIONS OF EXCESS

CONTEMPORARY HONG KONG CINEMA by Barry Long

As Hong Kong cinema becomes all the rage, I have been somewhat disappointed by the reactions to this new "fad". On one side we have the most enthusiastic responses from the fanzine/cult community. Each review I see screams the "outrageousness", "over the topness", and "inventiveness" of the latest films, however the reviews tend to simply give plot descriptions and thumbs up or down ratings. These reviews see only surface and rarely show any type of real thought about the films or the culture which produced them.

On the other hand, the academic community has (more or less) ignored these films as a whole or dismissed them as low-brow "fun". These films often beg questions of gender, sexuality, national identity and allegory, yet because most H.K. films don't fit into the category of art film (e.g. Zhang Yi-mou), their playful intertextuality with Hollywood films, their blatant commercialism, and the relative difficulty of obtaining the films outside of larger Chinatowns most academics haven't seen these films or don't know what to make of them.

As for myself, I am highly invested in these films. The major reason is because I find these films remarkably entertaining while also intellectually stimulating. As a "queer" masters student at New York University's Cinema Studies department, I had certainly seen a large amount of diverse films (personal faves range from Argento and Deodato to Altman and Lynch). Even with H.K.'s insistent references to Hollywood films, they struck me as being unlike anything I had seen before and challenged many of my assumptions about both film and film theory. In this essay I will explore some of the issues which have led to something of an obsession with both the films and the culture. I should state that up until a year ago I knew next to nothing about Chinese culture and am still no expert. Thanks to many friends' input (special thanks to Zhang Ming-ji, Leo Chen, Hector Rodriguez, Rob Price and especially George Wu who first introduced me to these films) I think the ideas I am presenting are indeed possible ways of understanding both Chinese films and culture. The two areas I want to discuss are notions of allegorical readings of film and issues of sexuality and gender as presented in H.K. cinema.

One of the most common criticisms of H.K. films is that they tend to favor stylish show pieces over a consistent cause-effect narrative. Though I wouldn't want to make any overly strict generalizations, I would argue that this is not the point of many Chinese films (or the theatre or opera which are certainly the most direct influence on H.K. film), instead the narrative focus on the "present-ness" of the moment in both the film and audience. The narratives of the films focus on the individual moments over the goal oriented narrative structures favored in most Hollywood films (i.e. it is not a question of where you're going but of how you get there). The films are filled with alienation devices which constantly remind you that you're watching a film. Through excessive use of slow and fast motion, bizarre camera work, exaggerated use of color, genre hopping, et cetera, the spectator is constantly reminded that one is watching a film. This is certainly different from Hollywood films in which the viewer is usually encouraged to forget that they are watching a film, and in which cinema stylistics are often concealed in an attempt to create a feeling of "realism." With this said it is not surprising that many people find the plots incoherent and confusing. However, I do find the films remarkably consistent on a more abstract thematic and allegorical level.

In the often raved about **HEROIC TRIO** (1993, Johnny To and Ching Siu-tung) many people have praised its over the top qualities, but complained that the plot was sometimes lacking. I find this film

one of the best candidates for an allegorical reading; and in this respect the film makes perfect sense. The story concerns three women, the first is Dong Dong (Anita Mui), who, unknown to her police chief husband, is Wonder Woman, a super hero hot on the trail of an invisible kidnapper of male infants from the local hospital. The second is Chat (Maggie Cheung), also known as the Thief-catcher, who is a mercenary hired by the police commissioner to rescue his kidnapped son. The third is San (Michelle Yeoh/Khan) who has been brainwashed by an evil eunuch and is now kidnapping the boys from which the next emperor of China will be chosen. As the film progresses Dong Dong convinces the other two women of the error of their ways and the three unite to defeat the evil eunuch.

The story is fraught with political and historical references. The more one knows about Chinese history and culture, the more one can see that this is yet another film which is exploring the impending return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Allegorically speaking the film is about both the division of China into three parts and the possible future of a reunited China. The three women at the center of the story represent the three divided parts of China. San represents the Peoples Republic of China. As it would be far too risky to openly name communist China as the villain (the shadow of 1997 falls everywhere), the film uses San's clothing (an overabundance of red, which is certainly loaded in its symbolic implications) and her connection to the eunuch and its "otherness". Dong Dong stands in for the Republic of China. When Mao (and communism) came to power in 1949, many of the nationalists who supported the Republic of China (est. by Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1911) moved to Taiwan and to this day still maintain that they are the real Chinese government. Dong Dong's association with the noble master establishes her as the authentic bearer of traditional Chinese culture. Chat stands in for Hong Kong. This port city was annexed to Britain by the Qing government in 1897 as part of the agreement to end the opium war at that time and to prevent Britain from colonizing all of China. Being a hybrid of both cultures, both cultures reject Hong Kong—Britain for its asianness and China for its westernness. The popular stereotype of Hong Kong people by the Chinese is that they are greedy, vulgar and tacky, which could certainly describe Chat's character at the beginning of the film. She is also the most westernized of the three (she favors guns over the more traditional Chinese weapons favored by Dong Dong and San, occasionally throws in english words and phrases, and constantly whistles "London Bridge is Falling Down" —a clear reference to 1997). The evil eunuch represents several distinct time periods and cultures. Eunuchs in general are from the manchuian Qing dynasty while the underground lair is of Mongolian design. This is significant because the manchurians and the Mongolians are the only two groups of outsiders to have conquered all of China and the Han peoples. The eunuch here is a sign of the archaic (trapped in history) and of "otherness" (racial and sexual).

The final message of the film seems to be that if the three Chinese cultures can overcome their differences and become one collective they can become a super-power. This can be done, according to the film, by simultaneously exorcising Chinese culture of the negative aspects of foreign domination (specifically Russian communism and British westernization) in favor of a more pure (authentic) Chinese culture and modernizing that culture on Chinese terms. It should be noted that some friends were disturbed by what they saw as racist undertones of the demonization of both the Manchurians and Mon-

goleans, since they are now assimilated into "Chinese" culture (the scene where Chat kills the young children at the end of the film is certainly disturbing in this light).

There are many other aspects of this film which bear discussion, however my project here is to demonstrate that by learning about Chinese history and culture, one can add depth to these films which are often perceived as shallow. For those unfamiliar with Chinese culture and history, the films can offer an interesting mode of access to this culture.

The second aspect of H.K. cinema is that of the representation of issues of gender and sexuality. But before discussing cinematic representations of sexuality, I would like to briefly discuss the history of sexuality in China. Many westerners tend to perceive sexuality as a completely fixed and immutable force. However, as feminist and gay critics have pointed out, our current understanding of sexuality is the product of the last hundred years of categorization by psychoanalysts, sexologists and medical doctors. Instead of being a force of nature, sexuality can be seen as a product of specific societies in order to fulfill specific political, economic, and social demands. Many different cultures of the world have, to varying degrees, different ways of understanding sexuality and categorizing it. Historically in China, for example, physicality between men would not have had the same implications as it does today in the west with our categories of hetero-, homo-, and bi-sexual. Men were (and to some extent still are) able to express friendship through physical contact without any implications of a "deviant" sexuality. In fact one could go so far as to say that men were able to express friendship in sexual terms as a form of strengthening their relationship. As long as it wasn't spoken about and the men fulfilled their marital roles, same-sex encounters were socially tolerable (from the wife's point of view it was preferable since a husband's extramarital relationship with a woman would be considered a threat to the wife whereas a man was not considered a threat). As western ideas of feminism and gay politics are imported into China, Chinese sexuality has had to be renegotiated to encompass these different conceptions of sexuality and gender roles. For example, as concepts of gay "identities" and political movements are introduced into Chinese culture, male physicality and conduct have become more restricted. While some men have chosen to embrace these gay "identities" as a liberation from traditional sexual constraints, it has also produced more repression of physicality between men. Western notions of feminism have had a similar give and take effect, being both liberating and limiting.

In Ronnie Yu's disappointing sequel **BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR 2**, we are presented with this problem. In this film Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia heads a sect of "feminist" assassins, who are seeking vengeance against the men who have wronged them. For the first half of the film I assumed that I was supposed to identify with the women's anger, since we are shown their mistreatment in flashbacks (abuse ranging from abandonment to being branded and treated like an animal). I certainly thought the men had it coming. However the second half of the film demonizes Lin and her cohorts in favor of a bland group of young warriors who are trying to rescue a kidnapped and brainwashed newlywed bride. This movement between sympathy and demonization can also be seen in many of the Basic Instinct inspired Category III lesbian psycho-killer dramas. In films like **THE LOVE THAT IS WRONG** and **GIGOLO AND WHORE II**, lesbians are presented as saviors to women in abusive hetero situations, often providing warmth and equality to the women. By the end of these films the lesbians are almost always revealed to be psychotic killers and the other women return to less than ideal hetero-relationships (Clarence Leung Fok Yiu's wonderful **NAKED KILLER** takes this theme to the point of parody, by presenting us with two good lesbian assassins, two evil lesbian assassins and an impotent male cop to boot). Most of these films find western notions of feminism (and lesbianism) as erotic and both progressive and dangerously destabilizing.

Representations of male homosexuality tends to surface in three distinct ways. The first is through the displacement of sexual contact into homoeroticism and subtext. The second is the brief introduction of gay characters or the protagonist's forced entrance into a gay bar (such as in **FLYING DAGGERS**, **FIRST SHOT** or **PANTYHOSE HERO**). The third would be through characters with fluid sexual identities which change due to specific circumstances.

The first type can best be seen in all of John Woo's later films. **ONCE A THIEF** provides the clearest example. When we are first introduced to Leslie Cheung, we see him standing on a bridge by the Notre Dame cathedral. He walks up to a man who has been sketching a portrait of him and after looking the artist up and down asks if they know each other. When the artist responds in the negative Cheung takes the artist's charcoal and writes his name on the drawing. This scene is significant for two reasons. First it simply looked like Cheung was flirting with the Frenchman (knowing that Leslie Cheung is gay certainly adds to this reading) and second the film symbolically sets his character as feminine. In the first sequence in which we see Chow Yun-fat, we see him in a museum admiring a Modigliani portrait of a woman, while in Cheung's opening sequence we see him being drawn like a woman. The film's opening symbolically sets up a masculine/feminine relationship between the two friends.

For the first half of the film we see Leslie Cheung looking longingly at the couple consisting of Chow and Cherrie Cheung, and it seems completely ambiguous as to which one he wants (actually, as Cherrie Cheung's character was so poorly drawn out, Chow seems the obvious choice). Recent Queer theory has introduced the concept of the homosocial, which seems applicable here. Homosocial is used to describe the situation when two men desire each other (consciously or not), but are unable to consummate their relationship because of repression and societal constraints, and end up passing a woman between them as a substitute for actual sexual contact. This term could perfectly describe the second half of the film, because when Chow is assumed dead Leslie Cheung enters into a relationship with Cherrie Cheung.

It could be argued that the H.K. gangster film is actually a sub-genre of melodrama, which is the privileged mode of expression in Chinese literature and theatre for almost the last 1000 years. In melodrama internal conflicts and emotions are symbolically represented in the stylistics of the medium and narrative excesses. As melodramas usually explore relationships between men and women, it seems odd that Woo pushes his female characters to the edges, while leaving a male couple at the center of the story. These male relationships are often fraught with homoerotic situations and imagery. As I stated before, physicality between men has come under serious repression (especially in Hong Kong, being the most westernized), so it seems odd that the men in Woo's films are so excessively physical with each other. The women in the films are pushed so far to the margins of the story that their only function seems to be to assert the heterosexuality of the men they are involved with.

In Ringo Lam's **FULL CONTACT**, this situation is literalized (I suspect that he was actively playing off the clichés in Woo's films). By making the lead villain Judge (Simon Yam) gay, the undertones implicit in Woo's films are made explicit. In each gun fight between Jeff (Chow Yun-fat) and Judge, Judge laments the fact that killing Jeff will prevent the possibility of having sex together. This suggests that the gangster film sublimates sexual contact with gun play in order to prevent the threat of homosexuality.

The second type of gay representation is that of the sudden appearance of a gay character or the protagonists' entrance into a gay bar. In **FLYING DAGGERS** (1993, Wong Jing), midway through this period swordsman comedy, a gay character pops up and seems to be the epitome of western decadence—he begs men to beat him while he speaks English phrases like "come on baby, light my fire." This is certainly a joke about the perceived westernness of the very

concept of "gay identity". This type of representation is probably the most common.

The third type is the representation of sexual identity as being fluid and changeable. This strikes me as the most interesting of the types, since it speaks potential openness of traditional Chinese sexuality combined with western sexual categories. In **ROSE ROSE, I LOVE YOU** (1993, Joe Chan), a character is easily convinced that he has amnesia and has forgotten that he is gay. The character has no problem accepting this new identity, his only reaction is that of mild surprise. In **CHEEZ-N-HAM** (1993, Blackie Ko) the title character Cheez accidentally has sex with Bobbie (Ng Man-tat) and is little more than annoyed by his sudden love affair with a man. By the end of the film the two men get married (both in wedding dresses no less). In these films the sexual acts themselves don't seem to cause the problem, but the problem is the shift in identity which they imply.

No discussion of gender and sexuality could be complete without considering the most interesting figure of all—Asia the invincible from **SWORDSMAN II** and **THE EAST IS RED** (1992, 1993

Ching Siu-tung, Raymond Lee, Tsui Hark). Though the book from which this character is drawn simply portrayed Asia as a Eunuch, the films added the concept of Asia's transformation from a man into a woman. What is intriguing is that Asia (Brigitte Lin Ching-hsia) destroys all sexual boundaries. Asia is neither male or truly female, neither heterosexual nor homosexual and represents both masculinity and femininity. That the character is a "villain" and still one of the best developed and most sympathetic characters in many ways points to the ambiguous status of desirability of transcending sexual boundaries and the fear that one might really find a way to do it.

There certainly is much more that could be said, however I will end the discussion here with the hope that I have demonstrated that these films are well worth thinking about and certainly filled with depth and meaning. By exploring the hows and whys of these films one can gain valuable insight into both Chinese culture and films.

NEW AND RECOMMENDED

DEMI DEVILS AND DEMIGODS. Director Andy Chin. Brigitte Lin (in a dual role), Gong Li and Cheung Man star in this fantasy/swordsmen film which gives new meaning to the word frantic. You know you're in trouble when a pre-credit voiceover gives enough plot background to constitute a separate film. The plot concerns power struggles between a bunch of power-hungry semi-deities. Though I could hardly figure out what was going on for the first half of the movie, it ended up being quite endearing nonetheless, mostly because of the good performances. While Brigitte Lin and Gong Li are obviously having a ball, it is Cheung Man who steals the show. She is a protegee to the villain Ting, but she has her own self promoting plans and double crosses. She is teamed up in an unlikely relationship with a naive Shaolin monk who unwillingly achieves the status of a deity. The film is beautifully shot in bright fluorescent colors and most of the fight choreography is breathtaking. It certainly doesn't hurt to have

three of the most beautiful Chinese actresses in the leads. And though I didn't recognize the actor who played the monk, he is not only a fine actor, but also one of the sexiest actors in Hong Kong.

DRUNKEN MASTER II. Jackie Chan reprises the role of Wong Fei-hong in what quite possibly is his best film. The story concerns a stolen jade seal of the Emperor which Fei-hong accidentally steals. This has a group of British colonialists (who are smuggling China's treasures for British museums) and a Chinese nationalist pursuing

Fei-hong and his family to get it back. The film flawlessly mixes comedy, melodrama and breathtaking martial arts sequences into one perfect New Year's film. Ti Lung stars as Fei-hong's father and Anita Mui nearly steals the show as his stepmother (though she is kept out of the action sequences, she steals every comic moment of the film). Don't miss this one.

GREEN SNAKE. Director Tsui Hark. Based on one of China's most enduring myths about two female snake humans and their encounter with an arrogant monk who is outraged that one of the snakes is having an affair with a human. The story itself has quite a privileged history. It has been



told as an opera (in the 1920's the famous opera singer Mei Lan-Fan performed it for Bertolt Brecht in Germany), several film versions (including **LOVES OF A WHITE SNAKE** starring Brigitte Lin) and has been twice used by famous Chinese writers as political allegory (first by Lu Xun in the '40s where he read the story to be against traditional Chinese culture in favor of Western modernism, and in the '50s by the Maoist writer Tien Han who read the story as being in favor of maintaining traditional Chinese culture). Tsui Hark draws on all these art forms and interpretations for this telling, plus he adds his own touches especially in his focus on the character of Fa-Hoi. In the original version of the story Fa-Hoi was a minor character and simply evil. In Tsui's version Fa-Hoi's character is psychoanalyzed and humanized. As we understand the roots of his anger (he is unable to control his lustful thoughts, therefore he attempts to repress everyone's sexuality) he comes across more as a tragic figure than a villain. The film is beautiful and poetic and certainly represents a major step forward in Tsui's career. Joey Wong (as the White Snake) and Maggie Cheung (as the Green Snake) turn in spellbinding performances, but it's Lao Wen-zhou who steals the show as Fa-Hoi.

BURNING PARADISE. Director Ringo Lam. Set during the Qing dynasty, the story concerns a bunch of Shaolin monks including a young Fong Sai Yuk who have been imprisoned in the dreaded Red Lotus temple by vicious and decadent Qing officials. The temple itself proves just as deadly as the Qing soldiers since it is loaded with deadly traps around every corner. Ringo Lam brings his tough urban sensibility to the period/martial arts genre with surprising ease, while producer Tsui Hark brings his usual sentimental touches and political allegory. Ji Tian Shen is wonderful as the legendary Fong Sai Yuk and is slated to be the next martial arts superstar (he is already slated to take over for Jackie Chan as Wong Fei-hong in **DRUNKEN MASTER III**). The film is dark, grim, beautifully shot, and exciting. One of the best films of '93.



THE WORLD'S GREATEST SINNER (1963). Run, do not walk, to check out this movie! Timothy Carey, the character actor fave who appeared in everything from Kubrick's *THE KILLING* to The Monkees' *HEAD*, spent several years directing, writing and financing this below-low budget blast. One of the most bizarre movies ever made, and over three decades later, it's *STILL* ahead of its time! A grotesque parable that's as innovative and subversive as any film ever made. Carey sticks himself in the lead as Clarence Hilliard, a middle-aged insurance agent who goes nutz and decides to become a rockabilly messiah. Abandoning his normal life, he changes his name to "God" and stands on street corners, handing out flyers, recruiting white-trash greasers to his fire 'n' brimstone "Life is Hell" doctrine. To raise money for his cause, he seduces old ladies for cash, and performs in an Elvis-like silver-lame suit. He even starts his own "Eternal Man" political party, which promises to make everyone a "superhuman being" (their motto: "There's only one God, and that's Man."). This is seriously whacked stuff, folks, and Carey pulls off one of the most intense, overwrought performances of all time (putting novice scenery-chewers like Dennis Hopper to shame)—ranting, crying, dancing, and looking wasted, his eyelids at half-mast throughout. Eventually, Clarence's followers begin rioting and vandalizing, but that type of social upheaval has to be expected when a new God emerges—especially one promising "No Death". When the political machines get wind of his rock'n'roll charisma, they run him as an independent candidate for president, but Clarence is corrupted when his dogma takes on fascist overtones and he starts seducing cute, 14-year-old volunteers. Though lacking in little things like coherency, Carey packs this volatile tale with venom toward modern politics, the media, dried-up religion, and the entire sorry state of the human race. It's even narrated by The Devil, represented by a snake! Carey is dead serious with all this craziness (even the heavily religious finale) and his outrageous direction is beyond belief! Most of the extras seem like they were simply pulled off the streets, and the score was provided by a young musician named Frank Zappa. Even its theme song is hilariously unforgettable: "As a sinner he's a winner/ Honey, he's no beginner/ He's rotten to the core/ Daddy, you can't say no more/ He's the world's greatest sinner." This is a true work of warped genius.

FAREWELL UNCLE TOM (1972). This flick is incredible! An Italian-produced *MANDINGO*-clone filmed in mock-documentary style by Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi, the happy-go-lucky deviants who gave us *MONDO CANE*. This isn't blaxploitation fodder though. It's a history lesson made flesh, recreating the wall-to-wall brutality that made up American slavery. In comparison, it makes *ROOTS* look like an episode of *THE JEFFERSONS*...Set on a southern cotton plantation in the 1800's, the weirdness kicks in when a helicopter full of filmmakers begin circling the place. Taking the old *YOU ARE THERE* concept of bringing a modern camera crew back in time to chronicle an event, we're witness to two full hours of debasement as every detail of slave life is rubbed into our faces. We begin with the slave slips, men crammed shoulder to shoulder, rats crawling on them. But that's a picnic compared to the cages and castration to come once they hit the Land of the Free. That's followed by brandings, enemas, rape, and general torture. Quickly, you realize that despite all their good intentions, these sick pastaland filmmakers love to focus on the most graphic, exploitable elements—giving us inhumanity on a grande scale, complete with sumptuous sets and costumes, hundreds of naked extras, and frighteningly authentic props. Using their investigative journalism conceit, inter-

views are intercut with the cruelty—half-witted whites spewing out horseshit philosophy ("Every great civilization was founded on slavery"); lily-white scientists whose experiments have proven that blacks are sub-human; plus servants, such as a 13-year-old girl on her way to be deflowered by her "Massa". I promise you will NOT believe what you're watching, and Jacopetti & Prosperi pile on the sledgehammer imagery to jaw-dropping effect (a white child and black child run through a field together—then you suddenly realize the black kid is on a leash!). And the epilogue is totally gratuitous and righteous, with a modern-day black man contemplating if things have really changed, followed by a cool Kill Whitey scenario! Yeah! Just what you need after this barrage of brutality. Filmed in Haiti, this pic is one of the most depressing, numbing ordeals ever put to film. A celluloid stranglehold. See it!

A CAT IN THE BRAIN [a.k.a. NIGHTMARE CONCERT] (1990). Goremeister Lucio Fulci has given the uncivilized cinema world a slew of grotesque gems—

300 YEARS OF HATE EXPLODES TODAY!



"FAREWELL UNCLE TOM"

From the maker of "Mondo Cane"

A Film Written and Directed by Gualtiero Jacopetti and Franco Prosperi. Music by Riz Ortolani. Techniscope-Technicolor. A Euro International Films SpA Production. X

from *LIZARD IN A WOMAN'S SKIN* and *ZOMBIE*, to *HOUSE BY THE CEMETERY* and *THE BEYOND*. This Italian King of Carnage has always walked a tightrope between Bad Taste and Extremely Bad Taste. But this pic is his 'art' movie—his most personal work, with layers of murky subtext lurking under the surface splatter. The primary question is: Does screen violence beget real life violence? But Lucio hasn't lost his sense of sick whimsy, since he begins the flick with a gooey close-up of a cute kitten munching on a deep-dish buffet of fresh brains... Taking a cue from Fellini's *INTERVISTA*, Fulci stars as himself—an infamous horror director at work on his latest chunkblower. His film-within-a-film features a psycho who fantasizes about dismembering a naked woman with a chainsaw, the camera never flinching as limbs are raggedly severed. But like his script's character, Fulci begins having delusions, flying into rages, and running out of restaurants at the merest glimpse of Steak Tartar. Lucio's line between Reality and Vivid Imagination becomes increasingly blurred when he attacks a documentary crew because he hallucinates they're Nazis, and is haunted by sadistic images from his own work, so he goes to a shrink for help ("If I made films about love, nobody would buy a ticket," he confesses). Unfortunately, the psychiatrist is even squirrelier than Lucio, and begins hypnotizing Fulci for his own murderous schemes. And just so his hardcore fans aren't alienated, every five minutes Fulci tosses in a dose of graphic, lingering violence. Even more than most horror directors, Lucio loves to stick shiny, razor-sharp knives through human flesh in close-up (complete with the obligatory guts pouring everywhere), and there are no restraints in the Cruelty Department—a cute little kid's head is even chopped off for a cheap thrill. His wicked sense of humor is sometimes muted by this extreme gore, but a favorite moment is when Lucio sticks his dinner in the oven and fantasizes it turns into a bludgeoned, gooey head. It's nice to see a horror director terrorizing himself for a change, instead of some defenseless female, and Lucio sticks his neck out with this imaginative endeavor. Though a perpetually convoluted mess, stitched together with old clips and sudden inspirations, it's a fascinating look into Fulci's brainpan. It's also one of his very best.

COBRA VERDE (1988). Never released in the U.S., this was the fifth and final pairing of director Werner Herzog and the late, great Klaus Kinski. Like *AGUIRRE* and *FITZCARRALDO*, Herzog takes a true tale of obsession as his source material, and pulls the viewer into a dark world, rarely captured on film. Beginning in 19th Century South America, Klaus stars as Cobra Verde, a bandit so feared he can literally empty a city street with his mere presence. And from the first close-up of Kinski's tortured eyes, he holds the screen hostage, roaming through the wilderness barefoot, his mass of filthy, uncombed hair making him a role model for a generation of garage bands. Kinski accepts a job as an overseer at a sugar cane plantation, and in record time the perpetually-horny Verde knocks up all three of the fat, greasy owner's daughters. In revenge, the guy sends Kinski to West Africa on a business trip to meet the King of Dahomey and acquire some new slaves—a task that will invariably bring Verde back in a coffin. Sounds simple enough, right? Well, what's a Herzog film without a little—or even a lot—of full-tilt insanity? Once in Africa, Klaus encounters a priest who gives communion to farm animals; a hermit-like Black soldier who lives with bats in a long-deserted fort; plus the crazed King, who has Klaus hogtied like a prize boar. Eventually Kinski helps out one of the local feuding tribes and trains them into a ragtag army. Equipping them with shields and spears, as Klaus struts about in Napoleon-style threads, spitting commands. Though the movie never achieves the focused intensity of Herzog's best work, Werner certainly knows how

to capture some incredible images, while finding great beauty in the African culture—who despite their peculiarities, are nowhere near as savage as any of the whites. Plus Herzog must've convinced an entire African village to be in the film, because at some points there are thousands of extras on screen. It's obvious why both Herzog and Kinski were drawn to the tale, with its epic scope and tragic arc offering a panorama of brutality, inhumanity and the crushing of one man's spirit. But while we get lots of twisted spectacle, the film lacks heart. Although Kinski strives for world-weary sympathy, it's difficult to root for a slave-trading megalomaniac asshole (but if anyone could pull it off, it's Kinski). The script is a mess of confusing alliances and it never gels, offering only random weirdness and another hypnotic madman to add to Kinski's resume. But even low-grade Herzog is more compelling than most of the shit out there nowadays.

SKIDOO (1968). This is one of my favorite celluloid misfires of all time! A hip, fab, counterculture wannabee, featuring a severely-screwball line-up of Hollywood cronies, all trying to keep their careers afloat by jumping blindly onto the '60s bandwagon of groovy hippies, free love and hallucinogenic chemicals. While doing research on this flick, director Otto Preminger dosed up with acid guru Timothy Leary, and it certainly shows on the screen. Unfortunately, this all-star embarrassment sank without a trace after playing the second half of one-week-only double bills, plus this work of wrongheaded genius is still unavailable on video! Jackie Gleason stars as ex-mobster Tough Tony Banks and Carol Channing is his long-suffering wife, and after a lifetime of crime, the mountainously obese Gleason just wants

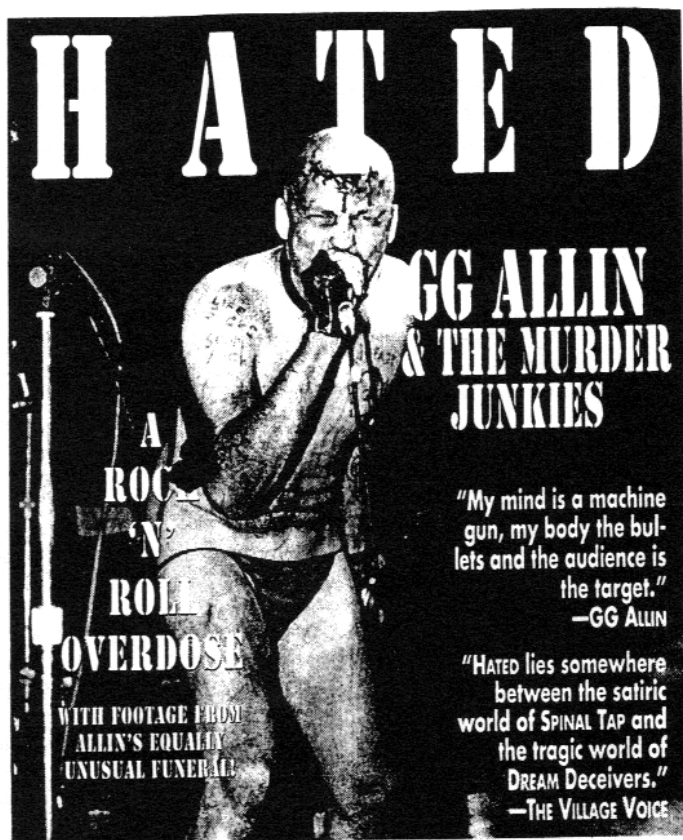


some peace 'n' quiet during his retirement. Unfortunately, there are rival hoods and federal agents on his ass, plus his daughter has invited a pack of body-painted hippies onto his front lawn—of course, in an effort not to offend Middle-American morons, these hippies are presented as harmless pumpkin-smoking (?) peaceniks who all look like Crispin Glover at the height of his geekdom. It's a pop art assault, funnelled through a studio sensibility, but what makes the film fly is its supporting cast. Since Otto played Mr. Freeze in the *BATMAN* series, he was able to pull other Bat-Villains outta the Bat-Unemployment Line such as Frank Gorshin, Cesar Romero and Burgess Meredith. Add extended cameos by Mickey Rooney, George Raft, Peter Lawford, Slim Pickins, Arnold Stang, and Groucho Marx as an omnipresent crook named God. Amongst the under-ancient crowd, there's a young (but still huge) Richard Kiel, Frankie Avalon as a

slimy Guido and John Philip Law (*DANGER: DIABOLIK*), who's nearly unrecognizable as a hairball flower child. The story gets substantially subversive when Gleason winds up in prison and meets genius/anarchist Austin Pendleton, who has smuggled L.S.D. into his cell via laced stationary paper. And when Gleason accidentally writes a letter, he suddenly turns into the ultimate tripping, babbling, fat fuck. I LOVED IT! I'm always a sucker for cheapjack drug visuals, but when it's happening to Ralph Cramden, it's a cause celebre! First off, Pendleton shrinks to Lilliputian size and lectures about Existence while standing inside a glowing, purple pyramid, plus cool eyeball imagery and floating carpentry screws with Groucho heads. When Jackie finally returns to this galaxy, he's a changed man—refusing to kill and giving up his old, criminal habits (says one cellmate: "Maybe if I took some of that stuff I wouldn't have to rape anyone anymore"). Still, he's not adverse to dosing the entire prison in order to escape via a hot air balloon, with the guards totally brain-fried as they stare at the solarized, dancing garbage cans (abetted by Harry Nilsson's *Trash Can Love Theme*). The brain-numbing finale has Gleason, Channing and all the spaced-out hippies rallying to stop God (Sounds symbolic? It ain't) by "loving him to death" as Carol groans the title song, "Skidoo" (thanks again, Nilsson). The most terrifying, cornea-damaging moments involve Channing's mini-skirts and her hideous, scrawny, withered legs—she even resorts to a striptease at one point, which probably sent audience members running for the nearest vomitorium...Preminger certainly had a lot of guts (or blind clout) to get this mess made, and though I admire its surprisingly positive view of L.S.D. and inspired moments of drug-induced madness, it's still just a faddy gimmick for this Rat Pack-esque caper. But how can you NOT love a movie that ends with Groucho taking a roach as all the end credits are SUNG!? I guess it all seemed like a good idea at the time—and while under the influence, it still is. Truly, this is a movie to be cherished by Badfilm Aficionados for centuries to come.

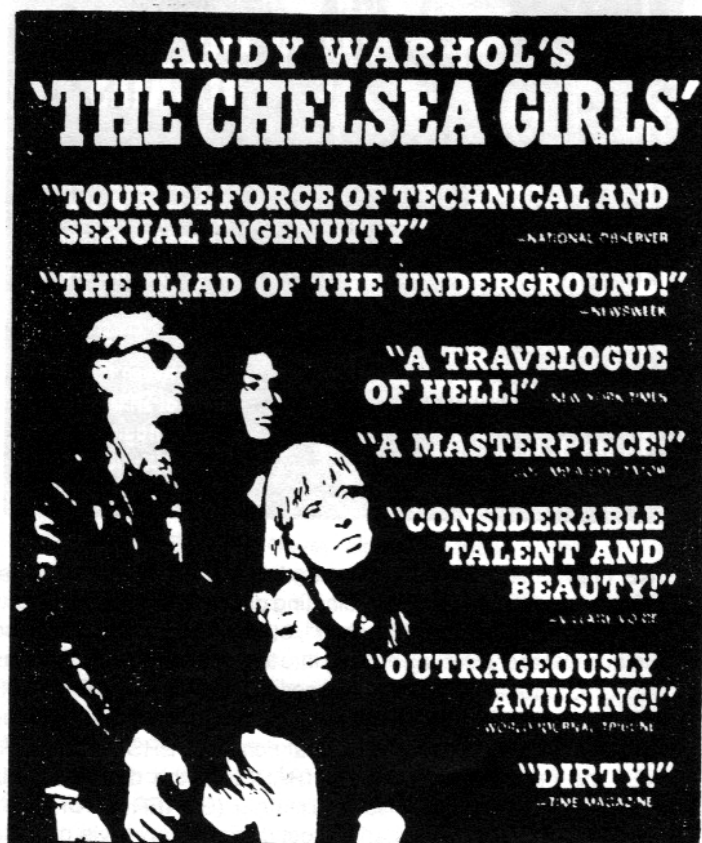
HATED: G.G. ALLIN AND THE MURDER JUNKIES (1993). Any flick that opens with a quote from John Wayne Gacy is setting the viewer up with some high expectations, but director Todd Phillips' triumphant documentary on the late G.G. Allin really delivers. Best of all, this pic isn't some adoring fan letter to a misunderstood genius (yeah, right), but a witty, savvy portrait of his life, art and long-promised demise...Just in case you don't know G.G., the guy was without question one of the nastiest, most disgusting performers to ever grace a stage—a man filled with such explosive rage that anything could happen (and usually did). The type of musician who shoves a peeled banana up his ass as an intro to his act, shits on the floor and wears it, then heaves insults, chairs or feces at the crowd. No surprise that his gigs usually landed him in either the hospital or prison. Todd packs the hour-long flick with incredible footage, capturing the guy on stage (usually pale and naked, his little weenie hanging limp) and off. And though he tries to analyze the guy's family and upbringing—even venturing back to G.G.'s Vermont hometown and high school buddies—mostly, the flick is G.G. at his most vile, abrasive and hilarious. It begins with G.G. returning to New York City (after a couple years in the pen) to kick off a new tour that falls apart before it even begins. With further insight coming from G.G.'s brother/bassist, Merle; his spaced-out drummer, Dino, who's done time for exposing himself to a little girl; cynical ex-guitarist Chicken John (Best line: "The biggest losers on the planet flock to him like maggots."); and poor, pathetic Dee Dee Ramone, who only lasted one week with the group. The biggest (unintentional) laughs come from Unk, a rabid G.G. fanatic as well as the classic example of a white suburban burn-out loser. Todd even goes so far as to secure home movies of a typical G.G. birthday party, in which a girl pisses on Allin's face after which he throws up on himself. And for its video release, Todd tags the pic with b&w footage of G.G.'s funeral. Included in the mix are snippets of such M.O.R. faves as "Suck My Ass It Smells", "Cunt Sucking

Cannibal" and a creepy rendition of Zevon's "Carmelita". The final impression we get of G.G. is that of a sad, belligerent, fucked-up loner, whose fans embraced his in-your-face nihilism since G.G. was doing things they only wished they had the balls to try. Who, after numerous suicide promises, went out with a whimper instead of a bang, quietly O.D.'ing after a riot-inducing gig at The Gas Station on Avenue B. And Todd Phillips expertly lashes it all together into one of the most savagely entertaining, enlightening films of the year!



MORE (1969). As far as my pin-headed opinion matters, Barbet Schroeder is one of the most fascinating directors of all time. I know a lot of you are saying "Barbie who?", but Schroeder has displayed the unique ability of worming his way into the most bizarre sub-stratas of life. Unfortunately, his most successful work (*SINGLE WHITE FEMALE*) is also his most pedestrian, but the guy has also taken us into the complex worlds of the amoral rich (*REVERSAL OF FORTUNE*), the professional alcoholic (*BARFLY*), the dominatrix biz (*MAITRESSE*), and even insane dictators (*GENERAL IDI AMIN DADA*). This, his first film, is an almost documentary-style glimpse into the late-'60s drug scene—and probably one of the truest depictions ever put on film. Don't expect cheap, nostalgic psychedelia here, kids, because this is depressing as hell. Based on the diary of a dead friend, the pic depicts his final six months, and though all this might sound like early "Just Say No" proselytizing, the flick gives us both the good and bad without passing judgement. And at times it's a virtual instruction manual for Amateur Addicts (not to mention, one of the rare movies where the cast knows how to smoke a joint, instead of puffing on it like a Marlboro). Schroeder avoids normal Tinseltown storytelling, letting Nestor Almendros' stoned cinematography pull the viewer in (any credit sequence that features Pink Floyd music as the camera stares into the sun means the filmmakers *know* the topic at hand), as these naive, drug-addled deadbeats tell their own tale in their own time. Klaus Grunberg stars as a young German drifter named Stefan who's sucked into the junkie lifestyle when he falls for Estelle (Mimsy Farmer), a cute blonde American with a penchant for

excess. Though at first he follows her because he's simply horny, soon Stefan begins to groove on her trip, which on the surface appears to be bumming across Europe, sunbathing nude by the sea, sucking on joints, and exploring the pleasures of ennui together. And Mimsy is such a charismatic, self-serious schizo, you begin to understand how Stefan can lose himself in her world (I admit I've done the same thing myself). But the moment he asks her "What's Horse?", you know the poor schmuck's gonna be shooting up, with both of 'em becoming a strung-out Sid 'n' Nancy for the Flower Power generation—a doomed, self-destructive love affair which (happily) never strives for any cheap sympathy. In fact, most of the leads are so fucked up and annoyingly real that you wanna kick all their teeth out, and their fate isn't so much the fault of drugs than their own general lack of a future (or a personality). These characters are burnt, extra-crispy. Mimsy is perfect, her coquettish sex appeal hiding her manipulative streak, and if Klaus is a bit stiff, at least he looks the part. Whether you laugh at them, or laugh with them during their spiral from pot to heroin to L.S.D., it's all so realistic it's frightening. A portrait of pharmacy-based banality and a time capsule to be savored.



THE CHELSEA GIRLS (1966). This epic flick was the cause celebre of the underground circuit throughout the mid-'60s, permanently placing Andy Warhol on the party A-list. But I suspect more people discussed and extolled this experimental 16mm, b&w watershed than actually had the patience to sit through the thing. First off, this showcase for all of Warhol's self-proclaimed "superstars" clocks in at nearly three-and-a-half hours, which, on the positive side, is only half the length of Andy's earlier, coma-inducing *EMPIRE* and *SLEEP*. And he continued his notorious, anti-filmmaking technique by stitching together long, uninterrupted 33 minute takes—turning on his camera and letting it roll until the film runs out in mid-sentence—capturing his odd collection of friends and parasites in rambling, slice-of-life non-adventures, some loosely scripted and some totally improvised. Then, in his brightest move, Andy decided to run the movie two reels at a time, the images projected next to each other on

the screen, so you could view two separate episodes at the same time. It's a nice touch, because when the viewer was tired of the boring shit going on in the left reel, they could switch over to the silliness of the right reel, and back again. Though supposedly set in various rooms of New York City's Chelsea Hotel, most was lensed elsewhere, and if Warhol's goal was to capture Real Life in all its pretentious banality, then he succeeded royally. It's alternately dull, annoying and (only occasionally) riveting. Though I'm sure all this tedium is enthralling for lobsterphile film students and the terminally stoned, it's almost unbearable cinemasturbation for anyone else...The total reel count: 12. With even numbered reels on the left screen, and odd ones on the right. For the record, here are all the action-lacked plots...In Reel One, the fabulous Nico methodically trims her hair while gabbing to her beau and kid in the kitchen. While in R.2, "Pope" Ondine (Bob Olvivo) wears a black robe and sits in a darkened room, taking confession from a few of Warhol's Factory folk, accusing one woman of being a lesbian and threatening to "twist your tits" until she tells the truth. R.3 features chubby Brigid Polk sittin' on a mattress, drinking a beer, bitching, whining, giving herself a shot of speed in the ass, and barely moving. R.4 has Ed Hood, a doughy-faced queer, sitting on his bed with a nearly naked young stud he's recently acquired. Other boys keep interrupting, and the Scintillating Highlight is when one guy eats an orange. R.5 finally knocks the viewer out of their stupor, with Hanoi Hannah (Mary Midnight, a.k.a. Mary Woronov) playing sadistic sex games. Aided by International Velvet and Ingrid Superstar, we get a lil' lesbian abuse, with one lady (stuffed under a desk) pleading to have a nail stuck into her skin. It's one of the few scripted portions (courtesy Ronald Tavel), and for an instant, I thought I was watching a real film, instead of an out-of-focus home movie. R.6 continues Woronov's dominatrix escapades, but R.7 is back to the ol' grind, with Ed and his junkie-nodding stud, Patrick, joined in their bedroom by transvestite Mario Montez, who serenades them with a hoarse version of "It's Wonderful". Patrick sips at a can of Miller, and both are so rude that Mario (and his towlewed-on make-up) storms out. R.8 has rouge-smearred Marie Menkie, berating her "son", Gerard Malanga, while a prim Woronov sits in. R.9 turns to color stock for a little L.S.D. indulgence as Eric Emerson trips out amidst psychedelic lights. His cosmic revelations include playing with his tongue, making weird sounds, taking off his clothes and rambling at length about his chemically-induced state. A Mensa candidate, he ain't. R.10 features Eric again, doing a dramatic reading with Andy's entourage. R.11 (the highlight) returns to Pope Ondine, who shoots up Meth on camera and turns nasty. His equally fucked-up female penitent makes the mistake of calling him a "phony" and Ondine suddenly explodes and slaps the shit out of her. For the remaining 15 minutes, he rants and bellows like some petulant child, and it's a startling vision of drug-deranged bile. For the final R.12, we get a close-up of Nico silently crying, with spacey Velvet Underground music in the background. It's a leisurely, lovely, perfect finale...All of this nonsense may be transcendent, but it's also trance-inducing. Modernism at its most vague and indulgent. Though I can respect Warhol's anti-art, anti-film notions, this celluloid behemoth is also anti-entertainment for the most part (though the second half is more absorbing than the first). According to rumor, a few vignettes were dropped after its New York City premiere (to tighten the running time? It didn't help), one featuring Edie Sedgwick and another about two "children" who live in a closet. If the length doesn't get to you, the spastic camerawork will—whipping about the sets, zooming in and out, or sometimes just focusing on a cabinet or table for no apparent reason, as if Andy suddenly got bored with his subjects and started fiddling with the camera. It's admirable that Warhol was churning this type of crap out, instead of sitting on his ass like most of us do, but it's too self-serious and somnambulistic for my tastes. Still, everyone should check it out for themselves if they get the opportunity—it's without question a totally unique experience.

CHAFED ELBOWS (1966). When first released, this was one of the most successful underground pics of the '60s. It's too bad the film is nearly forgotten nowadays, because this is a wonderfully ill document from the Cro-Magnon days of independent cinema. Over a quarter century later, it still has a crude, in-your-face charm and arrogance. And any pic that has a special credit for "Special Hindrance: N.Y.C. Police Dept." is all right by me! After this film's success, writer/director Robert Downey went onto cult favor with '70s fare like **PUTNEY SWOPE**, **GREASER'S PALACE** and **POUND**, and though the guy's still crankin' 'em out nowadays, they're lame turds like **TOO MUCH SUN** (with offspring, Robert Jr.) and Mad Magazine's only celluloid endeavor (thank god), **UP THE ACADEMY**...Don't expect much in the way of plot, because this is a wild, free-form ride through the life of Walter Dinsmore (George Morgan), with Downey's wife Elsie playing ALL the female roles (a total of 12), from Dinsmore's harpy mom to geeky secretaries. Encountering authority figures and social deviants of every shape and size, this absurdist neo-epic takes a lifetime of urban neurosis and distills it into a 63 minute **CANDIDE**-esque adventure.

When visiting a church, Walter is approached by a female "sock sniffer". While working as an extra for a pretentious underground filmmaker, Dinsmore wears his cop costume home in order to direct traffic. He even tries out the rock 'n' roll circuit with the cringeable tune "Black Leather Negligee" ("So kick me in the shins/ And don't forget the boots/ And rap me in the mouth/ And yank out my hair by the roots." Hmm, sounds like something Nine Inch Nails would cover). Downey includes evil-hearted police, an incestuous cousin, racist businessmen with theme park concepts (such as "Whip the Slave"), modern free-verse poets, and after Walter is killed, he even discovers Heaven is a farce—consisting of a kangaroo court with the Virgin Mary as a Beat biker chick and God as a Chinese guy—and is promptly tossed back to earth. Every moment is cynical and subversive to the core. Sick of a relative? Dump 'em out a window! Questioned by a cop? Push a fifty into their palm! And would you believe there's even a happy ending? (Well, if you consider Walter and Mom having a baby together and going on Welfare to be a happy ending, that is...) It's obvious Downey was desperate for cash—everything seems one-take, and many sequences consist of still photo montages—but what he lacks in finances he makes up for tenfold in scathing laughs, skewering both the Right and Left in the same breath. This rapid-fire whirligig still impresses with its speed, daring, and utter lack of taste. It's a terrific, satiric time capsule.

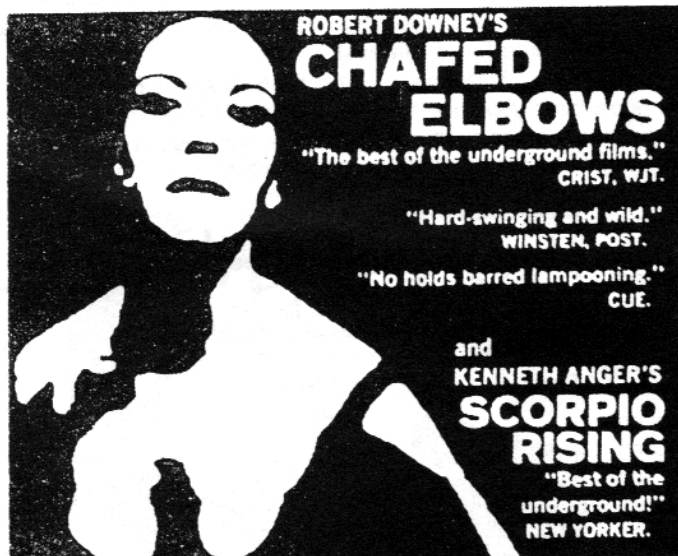
GODZILLA VS. QUEEN MOTHRA (1992). After spending the '80s bitching about the lack of new Godzilla flicks, the '90s is turning into a Renaissance for the Big Green Guy, with Toho churning out spectacular new adventures in record time. And like his earliest adventures, Godzilla is once again an angry city stomper—not some big, lovable pet that toddlers might confuse with Barney. It was only a year ago that Godzilla had his rematch against Ghidrah, and now they've paired him off against one of the most endearing of the Monster Island Troupe, Mothra! For Giant Monster Novices, the notion of a giant larvae which turns into a 400 foot wide moth that destroys Tokyo is difficult enough to digest, but when you toss in the singing, miniature princesses, it's just plain ridiculous. Well, they're

all back and more! With state of the art technology keeping the action lively and the seams in the monster suits barely visible. Takuya Fijito stars as an Indiana Jones-esque fortune hunter, who's sent to investigate a strange meteorite that's landed on the Indonesian Infant Island. After a few 3rd rate jungle adventures, Takuya and his ex-wife (warning: comic bickering) discovers a huge, blue Mothra egg and a pair of foot-tall, pink-prom-dressed ladies named Cosmos. The gals brief the cast (as well as Mothra newcomers) on their

background: They're from an ancient, advanced civilization that was nearly destroyed 12,000 years ago when the Earth retaliated against their misuse of the planet. Well, Mother Earth is once again pissed off at mankind's irresponsibility, thus triggering the introduction of an evil black Mothra, named Battrra (imagine an armour-plated larvae with P.M.S.). This is one nasty motherfucker, with huge spines, blood red eyeballs, and a jawful of fangs. He's terrific! And best of all, Battrra simply shakes off all of man's super high tech weaponry as if it were just cheap model kits (uh, now that you mention it...). But where's Godzilla, you ask? The Big G, greener 'n' meaner than ever, is lurking

around Japan, waiting for the best opportunity to stomp the living bejesus out of the puny human race. The action really kicks in when Godzilla attacks Mothra's egg while it's being transported on the high seas, and after it hatches, we get the ol' Atomic Bad Breath vs. Larvae Jet-Action Poison that Toho maniacs love so well. And if THAT'S not enough rubber monster mayhem, wait until Battrra joins the fracas! There are choppers, battleships, rockets, and a trio of big, angry creatures that'll have the most jaded monsterphiles cheering! Even the normally peaceful Mothra gets pissy when the Cosmos are kidnapped by an evil corporation who wants to turn them into commercial spokesmodels. This installment dumps the juvenile edge that put a stake into the series during the '70s, and even though it features a cute kid (who you wanna kick down a flight of stairs), she's quickly dispatched. Instead, the plot wallows in massive destruction on a grande scale, and wait until you feast your eyes on the image of Godzilla and Battrra rising out of the magma of the erupting Mt. Fuji! The finale battle royale is a killer, with the now-flying Battrra shooting ray blasts out of his eye sockets over Yokohama while Godzilla does his infamous Monster Stomp. Script-wise, this is nothing original, of course, but the miniatures are well-filmed, the creature costumes are incredible, the action is breakneck, and any humans are conveniently disposable (just as they should be, because who can compete with Godzilla for sheer Star Quality?). This is the best of the new entries. But wait, there's more...

GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA (1993). Yes, Toho just keeps cranking 'em out, and as long as Godzilla's filling the big screen (or as us Americans are stuck watching him, on a small screen bootleg video), I'll be there. This most recent adventure is a throwback to the sillier days of the ol' series—when the flicks were excuses for a variety of rubber monsters to toss each other from one reel to the next. This one features not only the two title juggernauts, but also the spectacular return of that flying pteranodon Rodan. And though lacking in the I.Q. Department, director Takao Okawara keeps it overflowing with wall-to-wall chaos...After Godzilla's recent triumph over Mecha-Ghidrah [SC#5], the U.N.G.C.C. (United Nations Godzilla



Countermeasures Center) is trying to stop our Big Green Pal from squashing mankind like the vermin that we are. Their latest weapon: Mecha-Godzilla, a silvery robot similar to the version in *GODZILLA VS. THE COSMIC MONSTER* (1974). The human subplots are tossed into the backseat this time around, with our obligatory hero, Kazuma Aoki, playing a hot shot pilot who's training for the crew of Mecha-Godzilla. But the tale really begins when a bunch of scientists explore an island in the Bering Sea and witness to a battle between Rodan and Godzilla. Only 15 minutes into the movie and already we're knee-deep in monster mayhem, with fireworks galore once Godzilla gets his atomic bad breath going. Of course, the (as always) stupid scientists lug a mysterious egg back to civilization, never guessing that when it hatches, out will pop a lovable six-foot-tall Baby Godzilla (so cute and harmless that you can imagine cuddly stuffed versions proliferating Tokyo Toys-R-Us). Of course, Godzilla is rather cranky about his offspring's kidnapping, so it heads toward Japan on a destructive date with destiny. After Godzilla sends a petrochemical plant up in flames, the gov't unleashes Mecha-Godzilla on a test run, and wouldn't you know it, besides all its secret gadgets (plasma rays, paralyzer missiles, Taser-like electroshock), the damned thing even FLIES! The final third is a riot, with Rodan changed by radiation into a glowing, red Fire Rodan (which inexplicably makes everything in its flight path explode), a modified Super Mecha-Godzilla, plenty of cheaply-constructed collapsing skyscrapers, and our pissed-off parent, Godzilla—who at one point grabs his robot double, swings it by the neck, and heaves the thing through the air like a 400-foot-tall sack of shit. And despite all his destructive tendencies, Godzilla garners most of the viewer sympathy this time around, since all he wants is to get his goddamn kid back! Needless to say, the dumbshit humans would rather have him level Japan than release their prize captive. Idiots...This is pure and simple city stomping with a parental message. And from the sugary stench, you know Toho aimed it at a more adolescent audience, complete with a gaggle of adorable (retch) school kids and marketable gadgets galore. The FX budget has taken a bit of dip too, but even if they fail to genuinely impress, they're just as raucous as ever. It's always good to see the old gang back together again, even if they're looking a little hokey and simply trucking old characters out of mothballs. I'll only begin worrying if they decide to turn Godzilla into a *talking* monster...

BLUE (1992). Not to be confused with either Kieslowski's or Jarman's feature-lengthed *BLUE*'s (how many films with the same title can get released in one year?), this Canadian-lensed twenty minute pic was directed/written by Don McKellar and produced by Bruce McDonald—the same team who brought us the dark 'n' quirky road movie *HIGHWAY 61*. But what makes this odd, bittersweet tidbit worth a look is the lead performance by David Cronenberg, playing a seemingly average guy who's obsessed with dirty magazines. His typical day begins by perusing the racks of magazine stores for his favorite filthy periodicals, and he's so wrapped up in his world of smut, he never realizes that a female colleague (Tracey Wright) has a

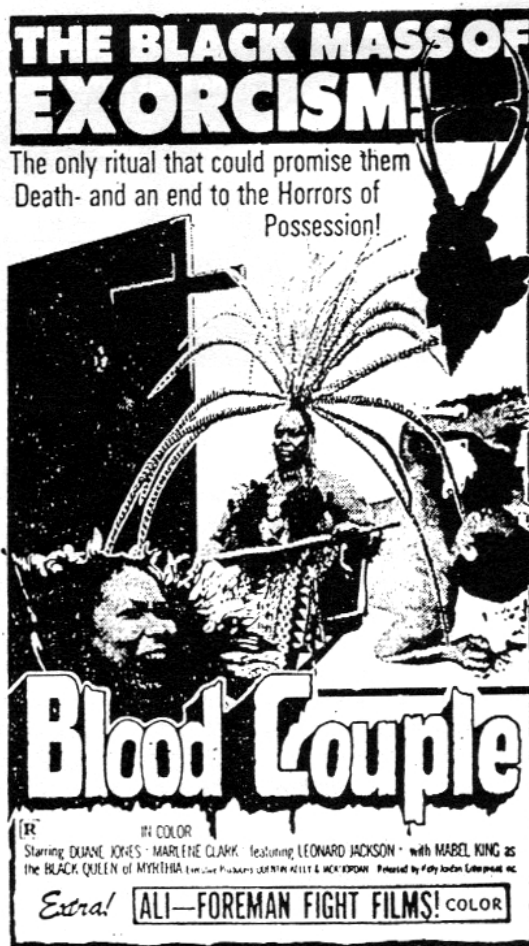
sizable crush on him. Instead of personal contact, the poor schmuck prefers to close his blinds, grab a handful of toilet paper and jerk off in the privacy of his office. These episodes are intercut with a woman reminiscing about her days in the nudie flick biz as we watch grainy, X-rated clips from such monkey spanking slop as "Bored Housewife and the Bellboy"—the lady explaining the intricacies of her craft as she gets a hardcore on-screen butt-fuck. There's not a whole lot to this short, and it works best during Cronenberg's sections, as a sad indictment of social alienation. David even gets to warble the theme song "Blue"—how's that for a true Renaissance man?

GANJA AND HESS [a.k.a. BLOOD COUPLE, DOUBLE POSSESSION] (1973). This pic never had a chance during its first release. The dumbass distributor gave it a sleazier title, hacked it by over twenty minutes, and even dubbed in then-trendy blaxploitation music

over its original, eccentric soundtrack. In its original form, this is an artsy little horror pic—smarter than expected, but also more pretentious than really needed—with director Bill Gunn putting a unique African twist on the old vampire mythos. Duane Jones (best known as the black hero from Romero's *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*) stars as Dr. Hess Green, who becomes one of the Undead after rummaging through the remains of the Black society of Myrthia. But unlike your typical celluloid bloodsucker—or even *BLACULA*—Hess still exists within the confines of modern society, living at a palatial house in upstate New York (Croton-On-Hudson, to be exact), harmlessly walking in the sun, and stealing reserves from urban blood banks to satiate his thirst. To complete the title pairing, enter Ganja Meda (Marlene Clark), a streetwise beauty who takes up residence with the Doc while searching for her missing hubbie (currently taking up space in Hess' basement freezer). All of this is extremely low key, and though we get some pretentiously-shot humping between the leads, this pic is nearly devoid of on-screen horror and bloodshed. Much of the running time consists of Ganja and Hess sitting around the mansion, adjusting to their new relationship and listening to the evocative, unnerving score which consists of blues, gospel, electronic hums, wails, and haunting tribal

drums. Gunn also intercuts (far too many) church sequences, with an overwrought preacher singing to his dowdy, matronly congregation. It's all dead serious, with the filmmakers finding atmospheric chills within the confines of their barren budget, while loading the script with Biblical references and Christian imagery. If you haven't gotten the point already, this certainly ain't Deuce fare. High on self-importance, low on cheap thrills, and occasionally disjointed, it's a film easier to admire for its heartfelt vision, than to actually kick back and enjoy.

SHELF LIFE (1993). Paul Bartel's best film since *EATING RAOUL* never got a decent theatrical release—I certainly hope somebody in the business gets on the ball and books this winner into some theatres. The N.Y.C. premiere was held at Dixon Place, primarily used for stage work and performance art, and located in a second floor Bowery apartment, a few blocks south of CBGB's. It's a comfy little space, which probably doubles as the owner's home in the off



hours. Several couches and kitchen chairs semi-circled the screen (in fact, we had to lug our own couch into place), with a video projector close enough to use as a table for our empties. The overall effect was like watching a movie in a stranger's weird living room, and as I sunk into a musty sofa I realized this was the perfect atmosphere for a movie set entirely in a '50s bomb shelter...The prologue is set in 1963, in a suburban home in Anaheim, California. When President Kennedy is assassinated, a typical middle-class family dives into their handy bomb shelter, and seals the door from the invading Commies. Thirty years later, most of them are still there. Though Mom and Dad died from food poisoning decades earlier (their bones still laid out on their bed), the three children, who were dragged underground when still tykes, have grown, but not grown up. Basically, they're 35-year-old kids who've created their own make-believe society by mixing fragments of history, comic books, the Bible, right-wing propaganda, and old television shows. And their only input from modern-day civilization are brief snippets of TV, which sneak through the layers of concrete. The brother and two sisters are played by Jim Turner, O-Lan Jones and Andrea Stein (the trio also wrote the play upon which it was based), and they're wonderful—losing themselves in their bizarre creations, wild set pieces and monologues. It's just an average day for these three hermetically-sealed youngsters, as they run through their daily games, dressed in tattered clothing. There's "Egyptian Fantasy" with Pharaoh Ken; a convoluted Pledge of Allegiance that ends in "Play Ball! Amen."; a "Schooltime" fantasy in which Tina (a teen tease) and Troy (the bad boy) run amok; and numerous demented delights (best non-sequitur: "I can't hear you. I've got a set of encyclopedias up my butt."). There's an air of vague sexual tension throughout (sometimes their wrestling gets a little out of hand), and the tone shifts at a moment's notice—one minute they're performing a choral ode to their dead parents, and the next they're spastically gyrating to a rock 'n' roll record. This is a perceptive, clever film, played for full-tilt madness 'n' sympathy by the three leads. It's their show, and Bartel is just capturing their genius on film (plus sticking his face in for a couple unnecessary guest appearances). A brilliant black comedy, and one of 1993's neglected gems.

MUTANT ACTION [Accion Mutante] (1992). The producer of this Spanish splatterama, Pedro Almodovar, has always strived to mix comedy and perversity. In director Alex de la Iglesia he's found a colleague who's up to the same tricks in the genre of blood-caked science fiction. And this futuristic, post-apocalyptic black comedy is ripe with high style and lowbrow laughs. Our heroes are a likable pack of bumbling cripples and freaks, who comprise the terrorist group Accion Mutante. Tired of being 4th class citizens, they drive around the burnt-out remains of civilization in an ice cream truck (accompanied by MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE music) and lead murderous raids on rich, beautiful aristocrats—striking terror into the hearts of trendy and hip elitists. Their latest mission: To machine gun a fabulous wedding and kidnap the bride (Frederique Feder). Everything goes rather well (OK, so a lot of people are brutally slaughtered. So?) and the blood spattered bride is soon an unwilling passenger on their greasy, filthy spaceship—her mouth stapled shut (ouch) to keep her quiet. But loyalties are fickle in the future (just as they are in the present), and the mutants' domineering leader Ramon (Antonio Resines) slowly

begin trimming down his squad of ragtag assassins with the aid of the huge, hungry mutant "cat" in the ship's hold. The acting is appropriately broad, with Feder a stand-out, looking lovely even when covered in dried blood. And it's obvious that the filmmakers had a relatively luxurious budget to work with, evoking the dinginess of *BLADE RUNNER* crossed with the demented humor of a top-level Troma pic! For example,

what happens if you've got siamese twins, and one dies? Why not stuff the dead

one and drag him around for the remainder of the film? And wait until you meet a nomad family of in-bred males as vicious (and twice as stupid) as the *TEXAS CHAINSAW* clan—since they've never seen a real live woman, they ejaculate in their shorts the moment they catch sight of the sexy Ms. Feder. Once Ramon and his kidnap arrive at the desert planet of Axturia, the "Stockholm Syndrome" hits her and she suddenly falls in love with the unscrupulous thug. This pic is packed with colorful chaos, razored satire on the media and high society) and cool special effects (from the same crew who worked on *DELICATESSEN*). Perhaps a little too much is

packed in, because first-timer Iglesia switches gears so often that the larger picture is often lost. Still, he never lets up, with his manic energy and maniacal sense of humor driving the film to its comic massacre finale. It's a wild ride, and just wait until you see the Accion Mutante dancers doing a congo line to their theme song.

WEDDING TROUGH [Vase De Noces] (1974). Often referred to as "The Pig Fucking Movie" (with good reason), this Belgian-lensed art-dirge is one of the most foul and pretentious pics ever made. It's so damned bizarre that simply detailing the plot can't even come close to conveying the unique combination of utter disgust and absolute boredom you register while viewing it. One thing is certain—director/writer/photographer/editor Thierry Zeno is a certifiable maniac. This stark, ultra-crude b&w nightmare is almost devoid of dialogue and is set on a secluded rural farm. Dominique Garry stars as a middle-aged guy who's already pretty strange at the outset, attempting to put plastic Baby Doll heads onto pigeons. But that's pretty minor once you realize he also has a thing for pigs! It's at this point where Zeno begins to lose his audience. You see, it's lonely all by yourself, with nobody but you and your all-too-willing farm animals. And Miss Piggy has such firm nipples (yeah, you actually see him fondling 'em) and such a delectable "Oink". Plus, the two have so much in common. He eats, he shits. The pig eats, the pig shits. Hell, it's a match made in heaven. Thankfully, Zeno never gives us any close-up penetration—just the farmer leaping into the sty, grabbing onto the pig's love handles, and thrusting his naked body against her backside (and if you think about it, isn't that really enough?). I just hope that Zeno wasn't trying to say anything profound, because although it's dead serious and sick as hell, I couldn't stop laughing at all this bold-faced ridiculousness. For ten minutes we get this moron stumbling about his pathetic spread, doing his chores. And then suddenly, he's fucking the livestock! Eventually the sow has a litter of piggy babies, and after watching Mr. Green Genes play with his offspring for about 20 minutes, he decides to strangle the babies and bottle their remains. This causes Mama Pig to fall over dead, and the finale is particularly touching, when the bloke goes even squirrelier and starts eating his own shit. Now, if I've made this movie sound at all entertaining, then I've failed in my review, because despite its truly



repellant subject matter, it's also one of the most monotonous movies ever made. Even the Fast Forward button didn't help. Though the movie occasionally approaches an ERASERHEAD-like effect, with its subversion of normal reality in favor of one's darkest fantasies, that would be giving it too much credit. Complete with shrill sound design and unrelentingly grim mood, I can only assume Zeno was trying to corner the market in sluggishly-paced art films for people who enjoy sodomizing swine. Congratulations. He succeeded.

PRAY FOR THE WILDCATS (1974). This is a rarity in TV movies—one that upsets and ultimately destroys sacred icons of TV. Imagine MAYBERRY R.F.D. shot like BLUE VELVET—though by a director several evolutionary steps behind Lynch: Andy Griffith—benign yokel, stand up widower with the sexless heart of gold—played a la Dennis Hopper. A stand-out performance, Griffith's murderous, megalomaniacal, over-sexed corporate doge is worth the rental price alone. Throw in Robert Reed (Mr. Brady)—another mythical never-was suburban uberman—as a tequila swilling spineless corporate lackey in a loveless marriage—to Angie Dickinson, no less, world-weary whore-with-a-heart-of-gold supreme—kowtowing to save his agency ass. Top it off with primal-scream thespian William Shatner playing yet another intensely complicated/repressed, intensely put-upon, intensely virtuous—though humanly flawed—Everyman with yet another bad toupee. All that's missing is Don Knotts as a glue-sniffing pedophile to round out the field.

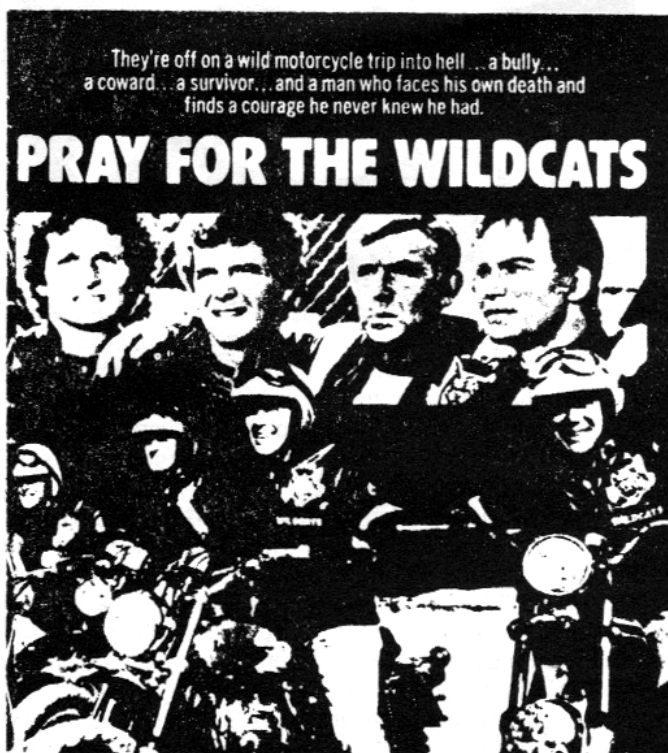
The women fare none-too-well in this film, which is no surprise. Ladies in waiting, they all typify different stages of feminine evolution—from brainless, turn-a-blind-eye-to-infidelity housewife, through a tough, sexual, but with-untapped-reservoirs-of-motherly-warmth slut (Angie, of course; she has an off-screen affair with Shatner. If your imagination fails you here, check out BIG BAD MAMA where the two of them have an all-nude, from-behind sex scene on a big brass bed), to the liberated young idealist (with as much character depth as Mickey Rooney) forced to choose between complete immersion in the American Dream or abortion. All attempts to develop their characters revolve around picking out colors for the living room, fighting over their men, asking for separate vacations and settling for divorce. Still, in a classic scene where Dickinson gives us the title line for this howler, the women stare plaintively through a chainlink fence as their men ride off on lawn-mower-engine dirt bikes as though these men were warriors never to return instead of petty corporate jackals licking the heels of a much bigger, and badder wolf.

Almost twenty years have passed since I first saw this, and there are scenes burned into my soul with all the weird intensity of classic Fellini. The cantina scene is over and above the best. In it, a wired Andy Griffith tries to dance with a lithe, sleepy-eyed flower child, starts to molest her all the while giving out a sicko mantric chant of "O.K. baby, now you're coming. Come on baby!" until finally beating

up her hippie boy friend. Several perversions are at work in this scene: Watching Andy Griffith as undulating drunken lech is akin to seeing your own father drunk, trying to dance with your sister while copping a feel at the same time. Twenty years ago, this scene was as unsettling to my pre-adolescent consciousness as Mi Lai was to a generation ahead of me.

Apart from pointless, seemingly interminable shots of the boys riding their dirt-bikes, nothing disappoints in this nightmare. Filmed in 1974, the clothes (the biker shirts looks almost too much like awful Trekkie uniforms), the bad haircuts, the post-hippie dialogue, the pathetic voice-overs as you watch inscrutable Griffith & Shatner faces (hilariously, the same scenes played over and over throughout the film), all work together to lift the audience into a revelry rarely reached by films that try to be everything this movie effortlessly achieves: a resounding indictment of the culture that produced it. To

me, this is the essence of *kitsch*, the only true modern form of subversive deconstruction where the audiences can wrest control from the author and uses the art to its own ignoble ends. Films that try to be bad, in the sense that bad films are great, miss the crucial point: only the audience can produce—*en passant*—these *kitsch* classics. The one sure thing about this prototypical TV trash: you'll never watch AnDEE(!) hug Aunt Bee the same again! —Benedict Hughes



Starring Andy Griffith, William Shatner, Robert Reed, Marjoe, Angie Dickinson, Janet Margolin, and Lorraine Gary.

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A Special two-hour motion picture produced for
ABC Wednesday Movie of the Week

MINDBENDERS Volumes One & Two (1967-71). I was on the verge of orgasm when I learnt that Mike Vraney's Something Weird Video had unearthed a slew of '60s L.S.D. propaganda shorts and packaged them under this alluring title. I've always loved these relic laff fests, which usually combined vague facts, laughable right-wing fiction, and hallucinogenic imagery into a tidy package that'd make *mewanna* sample acid if I was an impressionable lad (and come to think of it, a decade ago, they did). So sit back, dose up, and follow several pleasure seekers on trips that can cost "a few dollars, and his mind". Yes,

it's lysergic acid diethylamide time, kids!...The best is the 25-minute ACID (1971), a surprisingly even-handed document from the Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation. After cool, flowing graphics and a pseudo-groovy theme, we get a primary course in L.S.D. history. From St. Anthony's Fire, to Dr. Albert Hoffman, to (then) modern-day scientists hilariously showing off their collection of limp, stoned hamsters, this pic exposes the lies and gives us plenty of scientific info (though comparing acid to atomic energy might be a little much). There's terrific footage of hospitalized alcoholics receiving treatment with L.S.D., hippies recounting their trips, and very little preaching—making this a solid documentary with enough visuals to keep the acidheads glued...Mostly, we get heavyhanded scare pics like L.S.D.: INSIGHT OR INSANITY? (1968), narrated by REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE angst poster boy Sal Mineo, who seems soused throughout. When peer pressure convinces kids to drop a cap, all they get are bummers, freak-outs, flip-outs, and victims who usually end up sticking their hands into flames or jumping

off buildings...Whenever a drug short opens with an auto fatality, you know you're in trouble. And since L.S.D.: TRIP OR TRAP? (1968) was produced by the Inglewood Police Department, you know these teens are gonna try acid, take a "one-way" trip, and pay the ultimate price for the experience...Even more terrifying (yeah, right) is LSD-25 (1967), which is actually narrated by an evil ol' L.S.D. molecule who previously studied Jack Webb's DRAGNET vocal technique. The propaganda machine's at full farce, er, force here—with sugar cubes "that dissolve in your mind as well as your mouth", uncontrollable flashbacks, brain damage, and photos of how it affects fetuses (giving it the feel of one of those weaselly anti-abortion pics)...Finally, L.S.D.: THE TRIP TO WHERE? (1968) is a more sedate look at peaceful hippies and their drugs of choice. But even though the crew visits Milbrook, N.Y. to meet the first "acid martyr", Timothy Leary, it still settles for the easy propaganda of chromosome damage and flashbacks up to a year later. The grimmest moment is a just-say-no interview with bad guy/supporting actor Richard Lynch, who tried to set himself on fire in Central Park back in '67 and still looks pretty crispy...Whether pro or con, these collections are great! And all in all, it's over three hours of nostalgic drug hysteria on 2 tapes. Highly recommended, with an emphasis on the *high*.

LOVE LETTERS OF A PORTUGUESE NUN [Die Liebesbriefe einer Portugiesischen Nonne] (1976). Director Jess Franco has created an amazing body of work over the years. And a lot of it's total shit. He's cranked out sleazy dramas, horror and sexploitation at a record pace—in some instances over half a dozen movies a year—and in the late '70s Franco came up with insanely erotic 'n' twisted fare like GRETA, THE MAD BUTCHER and BARBED WIRE DOLLS. This NUN is one of his best (which to many, still isn't saying much), a West German production crammed to the rafters with both elegance and naked flesh. Susan Hemingway stars as Maria, a lovely 15 year old who's "under the influence of Satan" according to the outwardly-pious Father Vincente (William Berger). Of course, there's nothing actually wrong with Maria, but Mom listens to these religious hucksters and tosses her daughter into his Abbey, where she promptly gets a lesson she'll never forget. First, the nuns strip her down and check for virginity while the horny Vincente gets off on her rather chaste confession. And while the other novices play tempting lesbian "games", Maria is continually tortured by these Inquisitional sadists—who tie thorny branches around her naked body in order to rid her of the Devil. Needless to say, this isn't the most orthodox order on the planet, probably due to the fact they're all Satan-worshippers in their spare time. When Maria gets smart and tries to leave, she discovers she's a captive, with the story taking on the form of a Women in Prison pic, with Maria as the new fish. And after she's raped by the Warden, er, Holy Father, they tell her she imagined it all because she's possessed...Ms. Hemingway is fine in the title role, and even if her character is undeniably stupid, she's easy on the eyes and screams like a pro when tortured—the only two qualifications you need to make it in a Franco film, methinks. Beneath all its big, beautiful locales and earnest demeanor, this is lurid, cynical, anti-Church fun that revels in pain. Heads are squeezed in huge vices,

nipples are crushed with pliers, women are stretched on the rack, and there are plenty of nuns exposing themselves. Even if you know exactly where its going on a narrative level (including a disappointing, anti-climactic finale), this is a beautifully crafted ode to sex and sadism. Not up to the supreme weirdness of Ken Russell's THE DEVILS, but awash in cheap thrills.

THE MONSTER THAT CHALLENGED THE WORLD (1957). I'm glad that MGM/UA Home Video finally found the good sense within their li'l corporate peabrains to release this gem. Because it's one of the best monster movies of the '50s. Though lacking the budget of THEM or THE THING, it takes itself dead serious, makes the most of its B-budget, finds good locales, and spews out special effects which are just as cool today. The story is set at a Naval base near the Salton Sea, where a couple sailors have mysteriously died while diving—with all the blood and water sucked from their bodies (nicely gross). What about the quarts of white goo on the side of their boat? Well, the base scientist (Hans Conreid) tosses it off as just another normal marine secretion, but we know better, don't we, kids? That evil ol' radioactivity is once again to blame, with an underwater earthquake unleashing a creature and our cookie-cutter cast (in a typical fit of celluloid stupidity) diving in search of its underwater cavern/home. We get lotsa long shots of real frogmen, intercut with close-ups of the lead actor, photographed through a fish tank—and it's all so realistic I almost spit up my beer. The actual monster is kept under wraps for awhile, but it's worth the wait. Because this giant, ugly, mutant mollusk scared the piss out of me when I was a kid, and it's still kick-ass repulsive—whether it's grabbing folks about the head with its pincer jaws, or getting its eye poking out by a Navy bozo. And since the U.S. government is virtually worthless when it comes to destroy-

ing immense, prehistoric killer snails, soon the thing reaches public waters and starts slaughtering unsuspecting swimmers. Oh yeah, and if there wasn't enough cut-rate chaos already, the huge monster egg that the scientists have stored into their lab (bright idea, you morons) is ready to hatch! All these cheap thrills are punctuated by the standard Hollywood subplots (including a budding romance featuring Navy nitwit Tim Holt), but director Arnold Laven knows why his audience is watching, and keeps the action brisk and the body count high. It's too bad Laven's monster movie career never took off, thus saving him from cranking out lame Dean Martin westerns and T.V. shows like MANNIX, MARCUS WELBY M.D. and ISIS.

INDECENT DESIRES (1967). Directed by Doris Wishman under the pseudonym Louis Silverman and written as Dawn Whitman, this bizarre b&w nude romp is one of the best of its sick ilk. Though crammed with beyond-ama-teurish acting and an obvious lack of dough, Doris had a solid grasp on this type of trenchcoat swill. Instead of just

going for the money shots, she brought a female sleazebag perspective to the proceedings, not to mention a depth of fetishism that could rarely be matched by her male counterparts. Trom Little stars as Zeb, a lonely, lanky voyeur who finds a magical ring and a little girl's doll while picking through garbage, and takes them home to his nearly-barren, one-room apartment. But before all the flesh-pounders in the



crowd get bored, enter Sharon Kent as Ann, our nubile heroine. Zeb sees Ann on the street one day, makes a psychic connection between her and his newfound doll, and immediately runs back to his hovel and starts caressing the dolly while wearing the ring. Sure enough, while Ann's standing by the water cooler at work, she suddenly feels invisible hands groping her body, and this strange sensation doesn't thrill the lady, to put it mildly. Zeb continues his fantasy fondling while doing his best to seduce the real thing. Unfortunately, when he leaves flowers at her apartment door, Ann gives the credit to her hunky beau. So Zeb runs home in a huff and promptly burns his doll's face with a cigarette. You can guess the results. And just wait until Zeb starts whipping the doll with his belt! Soon Ann is "going out of my mind!" and almost committing suicide (as if this gig weren't career suicide already), going the REPULSION route by skipping work and freaking out in her bachelorette pad...Zeb is a truly pathetic fuck, so I'm sure most grindhouse regulars were able to sympathize with the jerk, even during his lurid fantasy scenes. And Ms. Kent looks like a life-size Barbie doll and acts about as well, with her wild mascara overdose and wardrobe of see-thru nighties making up for any thespian deficiencies. Sure, Wishman pads the 72 minute tale with gratuitous sex scenes featuring supporting characters and lotsa silent (re:cheap) footage of Zeb stalking Ann, but it's still great, sick shit—from its deranged concept, to the gutsy finale. A gritty Z-grade masterpiece.

MONACO FOREVER (1984). Here's a REAL four-star skeleton in the closet (and you know how much I love them). It's right up there with Cassandra "Elvira" Peterson's striptease in *WORKING GIRLS* and Brazilian kid-show goddess Xuxa seducing an 11-year-old in *LOVE STRANGE LOVE*. Well, this time Belgian meatball Jean Claude Van Damme gets to blush at his first screen appearance as "The Homosexual" (as per the video box), long before laying waste to John Woo's mystique in the idea-barren *HARD TARGET*. This 30-minute sex comedy from director William LeVey (who also uncovered a young Debra Winger in *SLUMBER PARTY '57*, and gave Frankenstein's monster a square afro in *BLACKENSTEIN*) is set in 1956 in the South of France (though it was obviously filmed in Malibu). Charles Pitt stars as Michael, an American tourist, who, while walking in the country is offered a ride in Jean Claude's spiffy convertible. Uh oh, Michael better be careful, because Jean Claude is the "Gay Karate Man" (as he's listed in the end credits). "You have strong legs," J-Claude tells Michael, while copping a feel of his thigh. When Michael challenges this "faggot" to a fight ("Please don't hurt me," Jean-Claude mock-pleads), Van Damme peels off his shirt and demonstrates assorted flying kicks. After a few seconds of muscle flexing, Michael runs away, Jean-Claude disappears from the story, and you'll be fumbling for the Rewind button, so you can run through this three minutes of jaw-dropping hilarity again and again, complete with inexplicable use of fish-eye lenses for Van Damme's close-ups! The rest of the pic is virtually unwatchable, as Michael's journey turns into a mix of wrongheaded, often-dreamlike episodes. He has an

encounter with character actor/troll Sydney Lassick, playing himself ("I'm an actor! I was in *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST!*"), and is later seduced by a blonde American dish (Martha Ferris). Turns out Michael is a professional jewel thief, as well as an ex-Nazi officer. How tasteful. Hell, it's all amateurish, incomprehensible crap with the *Terminal Cutes*. But if you're in search of some Big Damme Laffs, this is essential viewing.

THE LEMON GROVE KIDS [a.k.a. THE LEMON GROVE KIDS MEET THE MONSTERS] (1966). This movie (I use the term loosely) is so unbelievably pathetic that it's an instant classic! Who else but Ray Dennis Steckler would splice together a bunch of glorified home movies, devise a terrific ad campaign (including hiring ushers to dress up in monster masks and run thru the Saturday matinee crowds at appropriate moments), and con unsuspecting tykes into shelling out money to endure it? Much of it seems like it was filmed in his backyard, with Steckler (starring under the pseudonym of Cash Flagg), his buddies, and lotsa neighborhood brats playing a 6th-rate version of *The Bowery Boys*. And "Cash" does such a creepy, long-faced imitation of Huntz Hall that it earns him the Sammy Petrillo Award of 1966. This entire no-budget mind-number is so crude it makes INCREDIBLY STRANGE CREATURES look like a Merchant Ivory production, and so idiotic it makes the original *Bowery Boys* look like Chaucer. Essentially, it's just a bunch of short adventures lashed together, and the first, "The Lemon Grove Kids Meet the Green Grasshopper and the Vampire Lady From Outer Space" is the coolest, with the middle-aged "kids" spotting a small, round, hokey UFO featuring the aforementioned crew. The always lovely Carolyn Brandt (a.k.a. Mrs. Steckler) plays the blood-sucking Vampiria-clone and the Grasshopper costume is a pisser—including green face paint, tiny wings and a Prince Valiant wig. Plus, just so you don't confuse him with any other alien insect, the poor guy hops around like a fuckin' kangaroo! In "The L.G.K.'s Go Hollywood!", they visit a famous Hollywood starlet (once again, played by Brandt), with klutzy Gopher (Steckler) rehearsing a love scene with this dish. For the final episode, they get into a fight with villainous Killer Krump (Herb Robins, of *THE WORMEATERS*) and his gang, and the thrill-engorged finale has the two rivals running a footrace across

town (!!!). All of this is crammed with jaw-droppingly humorless slapstick and 'whacky' sound FX, but with only pocket change available, Steckler knew how to make it all look weird and garish, with hyper-intense colors permeating every scene. The Most Surrealistic Moment of the Moment occurs when Gopher accidentally stumbles into a scene from Steckler's *RAT FINK A BOO BOO* and is thrown out by the confused cast members. Though Ted Roter is credited for the first two episodes, Steckler is obviously the brains behind this dementia. In fact, there's a giggling, so-adorable-you-wanna-chuck-her-down-a-manhole li'l girl named Tickle who keeps popping up for a close-up—and it's no wonder, since it's Steckler's damned kid! Even after you've sat through this pic, you still won't believe it!



THE HIPPIE REVOLT [a.k.a. SOMETHING'S HAPPENING] (1967). Complete with psychedelic credits and a plethora of unwashed hairballs, this documentary, filmed around San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district at the height of the peace and love and acid daze, manages to cut through a lot of the bullshit surrounding the era. It's surprisingly cynical at times, capturing both the good and bad sides of the Free Love Generation. After a stoned commentary informing the viewer what exactly constitutes a "hippie", director Edgar Beatty takes us deep into their lifestyle, including a hippie wedding, a love-in picnic, strobe-lit parties, and a veritable overdose of body paint. A few of the segments are definitely worth watching on the proper hallucinogens, including a four-star lightshow and an acid party "graduation" to a new, "mind-expanded view of life". But though quaint and nostalgic on the surface, most of the subjects are total burn-outs, and you wonder where they are now—probably working the fry-station at Burger King and counting down the days until The Dead are back in town. In fact, the film itself calls most of these hippies nothing but "neurotic juveniles", and though their movement's leaders are smart and cool, most of the followers are just lost kids in search of kicks. This is a look at a generation in turmoil, and the filmmakers gladly allow their subject to ramble into the camera at length and dig their own graves. The movie also has its more thoughtful side though—it's not just potheads pontificating. The filmmakers attempt to explain how a small clique of rebellious idealists were turned into a colorful cliché within a matter of months, while exposing the darker side of Haight-Ashbury life, such as the poverty, overcrowding and homelessness. In addition, it profiles a nearly-forgotten faction of that period, The Diggers—activists who did their best to teach runaway kids and newcomers about survival and freedom. Featuring music by The Love Generation, this film is a mess of random ideas, philosophies and naivety. Then again, so was that entire generation, come to think of it.

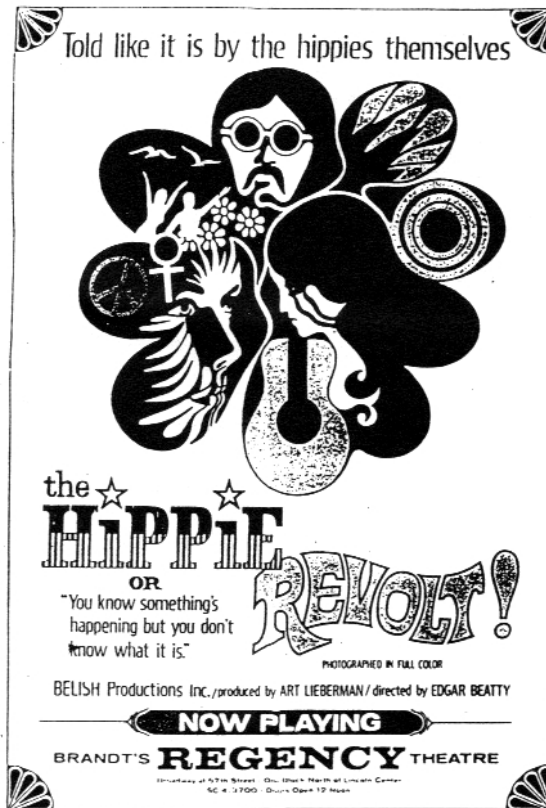
GIFT (1993). Perry Farrell took a break from Jane's Addiction to direct and star in this 80 minute pic, with the aid of girlfriend Casey Niccoli. And happily, even though they could afford real film stock and a glossy veneer, this has all the attitude and crude sensibilities of a no-budget, underground film. The storyline is loose but loaded with emotional hooks, and I figure Perry must've watched his fair share of Richard Kern films before grabbing the camera. At its best, it's indulgent, raw, and cuts to the bone. At its worst, it's a home movie with delusions of grandeur...The film begins with Perry (essentially playing himself) returning home after a studio session and discovering that his sexy, junkie wife (Casey) has O.D.'ed on heroin. Suitably bummed out, Perry decides to keep her death a secret for awhile, as he creates a shrine out of her corpse and flashbacks to their times together—finally dealing with hassles from the cops and paramedics. Sounds depressing? Sorta, but Farrell and Niccoli keep it ghoulishly goofy with their parade of eccentric supporting characters, including a zonked-out pizza delivery dude and a gynecologist/drug dealer. Plus, there are some hilariously grim episodes, such as when Casey is talking on the telephone and shooting up at the same time, using the phone cord to tie off her arm. There's a pleasantly trippy

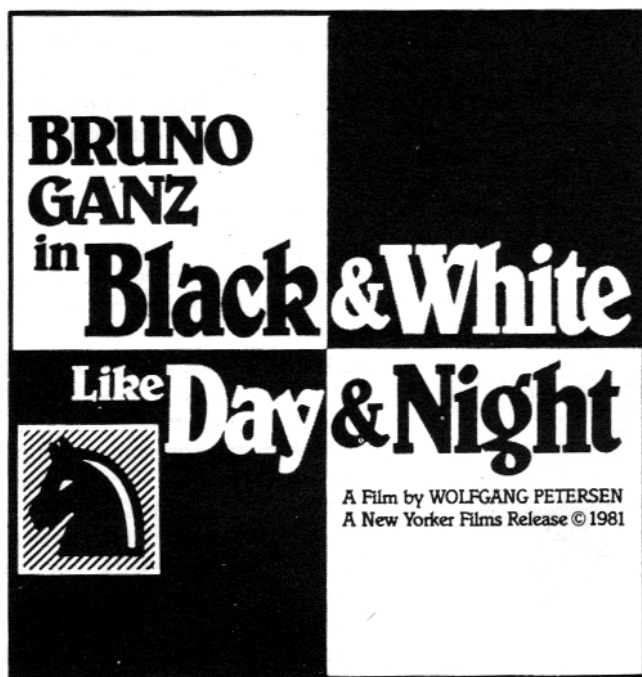
edge to the entire flick, thanks in large part to Eric Edwards' handheld camerawork, but coherency isn't one of its strong points. It seems like Perry simply tossed in whatever seemed cool at the time, whether it makes any sense or not. In particular, the randomly-intercut concert footage of Jane's Addiction seems like a last minute concession to

commerciality. Even though the music's great (including "Stop", "Classic Girl", "Ain't No Right"), it only slows down the already-tenuous narrative. Still, it's an wonderfully subversive first film, desperately in need of a clear-headed editor.

SGT. KABUKIMAN N.Y.P.D. (1992). No matter how many crappy movies they spew out with all the finesse of a beer shit—No matter how many pick-ups they chop to shreds for U.S. release (i.e. COMBAT SHOCK and RABID GRAN-NIES)—I still love watching Troma pics! Though they usually suck, the damned things are rarely dull, piling nitwit jokes upon nitwit plots. Grade-Z foolishness which you can spot (make that "smell") a mile away, especially when it comes to the auteurist stylings of Troma execs Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz, who brought the TOXIC AVENGER series to dimestore life. These two have patented the chutzpah of combining inspired, sick humor with rampant on-screen violence. With this pic, you can add another copyrighted character to their marketing department. Blatantly sucking up to Japanese audiences who dished out their Yen for Toxie's misadventures, Troma has

created one of the most ridiculous superheroes to ever grace a screen. It begins with the bad news that The Evil One is returning to take over our planet, and only the ancient spirit of Kabukiman can save the day. Unfortunately, the Japanese dude who was gonna take on his Incredible Powers of Good is killed, so a substitute is needed. Enter Sgt. Harry Griswold (Rick Gianasi), your average New York City flatfoot, who's enjoying a typical Times Square Kabuki Show (a retelling of THE ODD COUPLE, no less) when he's saddled with these oriental superpowers. Harry's less than thrilled by the way he suddenly transforms into the colorful Kabukiman regalia at the worst possible moments—consisting of an extra-large Kimono and a faceful of theatrical make-up ("I was depressed, I was confused, and I was turning Japanese."). A beautiful Asian babe instructs him in his ridiculous new abilities, including a super-powered fan, jet-action sushi and magic hiakus. His foes include a meglomaniacal Anglo executive, a radical black preacher, and assorted thugs. Though a little long (105 minutes) and never outrageous enough to be a true Trash Epic, this is the best Troma pic in a long time (was it ever released to theatres? I might've blinked and missed it). What it lacks in gore, it makes up for in surrealistic stoopidity, such as when Griswold accidentally transforms into a circus clown instead and takes a tricycle for a high-speed chase (you gotta see it to believe it). As usual for Troma, it's all acted with the skill, nuance and perpetual mugging of an old LANCELOT LINK show, and you have to love a movie where you get the feeling the writers cranked it out in one afternoon for some quick crack money. As for the much-heralded Evil One? It (a big, toothy reptile guy) pops up at the very end, and is swiftly knocked off. Packed with crude humor (including the obligatory Vomit-On-A-Yuppie gag—always a winner), this film is an ode to idiocy. But what else would you expect from these guys? Tolstoy?





BLACK AND WHITE AS DAY AND NIGHT [Schwarz und Weiss wie Tage und Nächte] (1981). Bruno Ganz **MUST** be one of the greatest actors on this planet. Because the German star of such high-brow must-see's as *THE AMERICAN FRIEND*, *KNIFE IN THE HEAD* and *CIRCLE OF DECEIT* can even turn a movie about the game of Chess into riveting psychological drama. Of course, Chess is taken much more seriously overseas—us Americans are too busy spending billions on neanderthal football teams featuring no-necked throwbacks...What could've easily been a minor melodrama is turned inside out by Ganz's subtly deranged performance, and under its surface, the film is as much about Chess as *TAXI DRIVER* is about driving a cab. Ganz stars as Thomas Rosenmund, a world class champion who, even as a child, was transfixed by the game. Not exactly a good loser, little Thomas would leap across the table and attack opponents, becoming feverish from the stress of competition, until his Chess set was taken away for his own safety. But as an adult, Thomas goes back into competition for the world title against his old rival, soviet Igor Koruga. During this series of highly publicized games, Ganz gets more and more wacky. He trashes his hotel room, gets plastered, refuses to play until he receives special perks, and systematically destroys his opponent's concentration. In one surprisingly suspenseful scene, Ganz drives Koruga nuts by simply fiddling with a small, glass ball—which may be more than it actually seems. But his trip isn't over yet. Rosenmund continues to push himself, breaking a world record by playing 60 simultaneous games, blindfolded. Then the paranoia begins. He raves that all his friends are traitors, that people are watching his home, and even suspects that his loving wife is putting arsenic in his food. As you can see, this isn't your typical feel-good sports flick. Too bad director Wolfgang Petersen and his lackluster approach keep the film from greatness. Still, he manages to capture an intensity to the competition—essentially just two guys sitting across from each other. Most of the credit

goes to Ganz, who's a revelation. In the years following, he would cut a swath through European cinema, and this is one of his first and finest. He brings truth to the role, never vies for cheap sympathy and paints a tragic portrait of obsession and madness. A terrific sleeper.

CHICKENHAWK: Men Who Love Boys (1994). This 55-minute documentary is sure to elicit strong feelings, since its subject matter is pedophilia (sex with underage boys). But while most pea-brained Americans will be scouting out a tree where they can lynch these child molesters, viewers who come to this flick with an open mind will simply be bored shitless by this parade of sad, pathetic losers in search of "flowers in bloom". Primarily, the film interviews a cross-section of NAMBLA members (North American Man Boy Love Association), whose (alleged) 1500 roster seems to consist of puffy-faced, middle-aged nerds who look like they spent far too many years living in their mom's basement. It's unfortunate that with so much volatile material to work with, director Adi Sideman stuck to the surface, giving the topic all the depth of a 60 MINUTES segment. When we're not watching these dumpy, unsympathetic men hanging out at convenience marts and trying to pick up teenage boys, they're waxing nostalgic about blowjobs from nine-year-olds and camping trip encounters. One teacher was fired for being in NAMBLA (with his high school students giving their varying opinions on the controversy). And another went so far as to rent an apartment overlooking several school yards, so he could spend the days gazing at his objects of desire. Though the movie could be misinterpreted as a recruiting film for NAMBLA (what with its proliferation of jailbait cheesecake pix), Sideman also outs several members in the process. In addition, we briefly encounter an anti-NAMBLA group, catch footage of a protest in front of their East Village headquarters, and hear from plenty of gay activists who don't want to be associated with this radical offshoot in any way, shape or form. The only celeb who makes an appearance is Allen Ginsberg (big surprise) during his reading at the '89 NAMBLA conference...Though some viewers might approach this pic as a freakshow—chuckling at all these slobs and their obsessions—I found the whole thing uninvolved, unfocused, and lacking in insight.

RED SPIRIT LAKE (1993; \$20 ppd. to Inferential Pictures c/o Fireball, P.O. Box 40285, San Francisco CA 94110. Checks made payable to Charles Wing). The latest video from indie moviemaker Charles Pinion is less audacious than his previous outing, *TWISTED*

ISSUES (but not without its vile side, thank goodness), as he drags all his pals up to the stark, snowy wilds of Vermont for this ghostly tale of unruly female spirits. Annabel Lee stars as Marilyn, a young woman who revisits an isolated house located on Red Spirit Lake, which used to be the residence of her great-great-grandmother—the one accused of witchcraft by fire-happy villagers. Supernatural forces are still at work on the property, compelling the cast to continually disrobe and/or masturbate on camera (all of which is tremendously integral to the plot, of course), and characters tend to drop in at a moment's notice, including a pack of sleazy businessmen who want to buy up her property and a pair of visiting friends played by Holly Adams and the delightfully dippy Bob Log (when a nude spirit gives him a surprise blowjob, he complains that she's "disturbing my subtle energy fields"). The best moments are from the two scraggly, local whackos, Thomas and Mathias (Mark

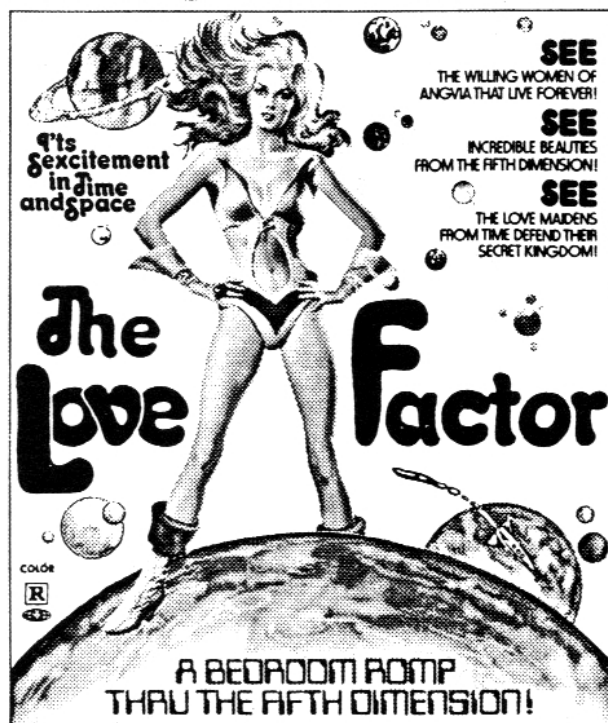


Abomaitis and Pinion, both chewing their roles to the quick), who were never the same after their contact with "The Angels" (in reality, silvery aliens led by Samoa). The viewer is also witness to hallucinogenic flashbacks of great-great-grandmom's sorceress days with her saphic congregation, and when poor Marilyn needs help, these ancient spirits are happy to lend a hand amidst a flurry of cool violence. Co-scripter Annabel does a fine job at looking bewildered (when she's not aerobicizing in the underwear or getting painfully backdoored), and there are plenty of enthusiastic East Village cameos. Richard Kern tortures a woman by massaging her nipples, Kembra Pfahler goes a nymph-like dance to Spring, Tommy Turner is a rapist, and the soundtrack includes snippets from Cop Shoot Cop, Karen Black and Lunachicks. Though well shot and edited, the harsh Hi8 Video gives the film (and the cast) a rough, unflattering edge, and even if its plot twists are thoroughly predictable, Pinion ties it together with a finesse atypical for today's waning underground scene. Packed with cheap violence, cheap sex, and an avalanche of nasty pleasures. Best of all, this pic promotes female empowerment on a budget most viewers would spend on beer in a month. It's a wild ride.

BABY BLOOD (1991). This pitch-black, French horror opus from director Alain Robak never got to the States, so the only print I could find was in its original language and without subtitles. It starts off a little slow and artsy, but quickly gets weird, intense and chock full of kick-ass gore. The tale begins when a crate (containing unseen, but obviously dangerous cargo, complete with portentous P.O.V. shots) is shipped from Africa to a two-bit circus in France. Of course, soon the thing is on the loose, and after ripping apart a full-grown tiger, it sets its sights (that's assuming it even has eyes) on the carnival's pneumatic cutie, Emmanuelle Escourrou, a pouty brunette who spends much of the running time half naked. While Emmanuelle sleeps, this parasite crawls up her vagina, and she doesn't realize anything's different (O.K., so she's not very swift, but she sure is purdy) until she balloons up like she's eight-months pregnant. Then the creature begins talking to her telepathically in a gurgly whisper. So what's the first thing you do when you realize a Mind-Controlling Mutant has made a home out of your uterus? In Emmanuelle's case, she goes nutzo, kills people and messily drinks their blood in order to feed her baby. I'm talking *heavy* sanguinary spillage here, folks. She leaves the circus and hits the highway, getting stranger and fatter along the way, finally taking a waitress gig, which gives her the opportunity to attract easily-disposable slimeballs who end up chopped to bits and gushing blood like a lawn sprinkler. Whenever she gets up the nerve to stab herself in the gut and end the whole movie, the creature's voice persuades her otherwise, and off she goes to find more nourishment. In one of my fave scenes she crushes a guy with her car and then rips off his head! And I haven't even mentioned the nightmarish birth sequence yet! Robak lingers on the viscera like any good maniac, and his direction is so stylish that you never expect the frantic level of slaughterhouse carnage to come. For the perfect pregnancy triple bill, pair this one with Andrzej Zulawski's *POSSESSION* and Rodman Flender's *THE UNBORN*—now *there's* four-star entertainment for expectant parents!

THE LOVE FACTOR [a.k.a. ZETA ONE] (1969). This British-lensed sex 'n' science fiction pic strives for BARBARELLA-style camp, but falls far short. Based on a story in the justifiably-forgotten Zeta magazine, director Michael Cort gives us a futuristic version of James Bond, and though he knows how to ladle on the bare female flesh, there's not one ounce of wit backing it up. He also has a fondness for cardboard sets and actors to match. In fact, this T&A fest would be a complete waste but for the always welcome presence of gorgeous Yutte Stensgaard (*LUST FOR A VAMPIRE*), who tackles her small role with unlimited charm and limited wardrobe. Set in the near future, Robin Hawdon (*WHEN DINOSAURS RULED THE EARTH*) stars as secret agent cum ladies' man, James Word, who returns to his home and is greeted by Yutte. The Swedish blonde bombshell plays the promiscuous, micro-skirted secretary of James' boss, W (do you

think Ian Fleming's estate could sue?), who first lures James into an extended round of strip poker, and after getting the guy into bed (not a very difficult task, methinks), convinces him to let loose with a few gov't secrets by telling her about his latest mission. So much for Ms. Stensgaard's curvaceous contributions, because unfortunately, she only appears in the bookending sequences. The bloated center of the movie is one big nudie flashback, in which a race of Amazon beauties from Angvia (a planet in another dimension) begin kidnapping earth women, led by their evil but beautiful Empress Zeta. In order to stop this depopulating threat, a wide-eyed stripper named Edwina Strain is asked to go undercover, and is soon transported (via the wonder of ancient camera tricks) to their crepe paper civilization, where all the women wear nighties. Edwina gets the grande tour including a trippy, nude lightshow, naked judo



training, and let's not forget the bathing rooms. I think you get the point by now. This flick is just an excuse to let the lucky cameraman ogle a bunch of scantily clad models. There's certainly nothing wrong with that basic idea, if only the rest of the movie wasn't so damned boring and lifeless. The outrageously mod outfits are fun for awhile, as are the sets, which look like cut-rate precursors of the U.F.O. TV series, but the filmmakers always seem to opt for smirky voyeurism and dim double-entendres instead of something fresh. The entire operation will only appeal to dateless sci-fi nerds or Yutte completists.

HIRUKO (1992). Director Shinya Tsukamoto blew away unsuspecting viewers with his dynamic duo of TETSUO and (the less successful) TETSUO II: BODY HAMMER. With this horror tale he tries to prove that he's not simply obsessed with gore and high-tech craziness—avoiding his usual barrage of in-your-face effects in search of subtler chills. Unfortunately, it's obvious that Shinya's strength indeed lies in his kinetic camerawork and gross-out sensibilities, because this pic is lame and tame, with its sporadic moments of dark humor and twisted horror sabotaged by dull characters and pedestrian plotting. An ancient burial mound provides the center piece for this tale of an evil, unleashed spirit named Hiruko, and when a young girl ventures inside the mound, she ends up nearly catatonic, singing sad lullabies to herself. Hieda, a goblin expert (complete with jury-built Goblin Destroyer), is called into duty, along with Masao, a young

man whose back mysteriously erupts with smoke and gross, black welts. The bumbling pair of ghost hunters go in search of Hiruko (sorta like Scooby Doo Goes To Japan), roaming about dark buildings and getting the piss scared out of 'em when they run across decapitated bodies. They eventually come to the conclusion that they must seal up Hiruko's secret burial mound in order to reimprison it—and before it can unleash even more demons. Thank goodness for the occasional moments of true weirdness, or else I'd have passed out by the midpoint. In particular, I nearly busted a gut when a girl's chopped off head suddenly grows huge spider legs, and chases the heroes about. Plus the (all too brief) finale featuring a veritable army of these spider demons! Primarily, this is just your ordinary Japanese ghost story, marked by state-of-the-art elements such as the high speed, Raimi-esque Demon-Cam. And though there are brief flashes of gore, it's never excessive. Tsukamoto does manage a few dreamlike episodes, but these lyrical set pieces are lost in a film that goes for predictable thrills, recycled ideas, and a saccharine ending that'll have hardcore viewers cringing. This slight, half-baked production left me cold.

THE ROAD TO GOD KNOWS WHERE (1990). Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds isn't exactly a household name, with the group's most mainstream recognition coming from a concert appearance in Wim Wenders' *WINGS OF DESIRE*. Coincidentally, this stark, black-and-white, feature length tour film has the look of an early Wenders' pic, and all the tedium to match. But that doesn't stop director Uli M. Schuppel, who's obviously a huge fan of the band. The film begins in Philadelphia, and follows the group across America for a month, capturing them onstage and off. The "off" part consists of them vegetating to local TV in their tour bus, drinking, and shooting the shit (in other words, they're just like most musicians---perhaps that's the point of the movie). Nick himself looks thin, scraggly and less strung out than usual, rarely playing to the camera, or perhaps not even remembering it's there. Brief highlights include Nick receiving a fan letter written on the back of a Hershey Bar wrapper, reading a local critic's unkind opinions of the band, and dancing by himself to "Papa, Don't Preach". But when Cave's slinging his tunes, his charisma peeks through, especially for the Goth Nihilism set. Unfortunately, director Uli seems more interested in capturing the monotony of the road than Nick's intensity in front of the crowd—clipping off songs at the worst moment or just showing his closing "Good night", before shlepping back to the hotel. We're given snippets of dirge-like ditties "Deanna" and "New Morning", Nick soundchecking to Peggy Lee's torchy "Fever", and only during his incredible, unplugged version of "The Mercy Seat" do we get a true sense of the guy's poetry and power. Most of the time, this is simply a long, rambling ode to ennui. Only diehard fans will resist the temptation of the Fast Forward Button.

THE GIRL ON A MOTORCYCLE [a.k.a. NAKED UNDER LEATHER] (1968). Filmmakers don't make tripped-out dramas like this anymore. Probably because they wouldn't make any money and the critics would bury them. Of course, back in the late '60s, these pics didn't make any money and the reviews were merciless, but everyone was so stoned they simply didn't care...For this extraordinarily pretentious ride, Marianne Faithfull took time out from her recording career to star as Rebecca, a shapely blonde who decides to leave her wimpy hubbie. She slips into her black leather Emma Peel-style jumpsuit, gets on her beloved motorcycle, and disappears into the morning mist in search of her true love (frog heartthrob Alain Delon). Her journey doesn't really lead anywhere, but boy, is it filled with

dreamy visuals, style with no apparent reason, and tacky solarization effects. Though essentially a simple "woman in search of herself" pic (usually a yawner, no matter what gender is involved), I had to appreciate a film that's so blatantly fucked up. The intro looks like outtakes from Corman's *THE TRIP*, mixed with the mod gloss of *BLOW UP* and a Roeg-like fracturing of time and perspective. But it's no wonder the thing looks so fab, since director Jack Cardiff cut his teeth as innovative cinematographer on Michael Powell's *THE RED*

Pictures like "girl on a motorcycle" just don't ride off and go away. They stop...and stay with you for a long time to come.



ALAIN DELON · MARIANNE FAITHFULL

in JACK CARDIFF'S film
The Girl on a Motorcycle

SHOES, BLACK NARCISSUS and A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH. Meanwhile, the fetching Ms. Faithfull rambles endlessly about life and love and marriage as the countryside passes by—reveling in tedious ski trip flashbacks and coming up with some insipid comment at every turn (i.e. She stares at a leaf and babbles "I'm like a leaf myself". And for any moron who didn't catch the repeated, sledgehammer close-ups of a roaring cycle between her thighs, she explains that her bike "makes love beautifully" and calls it her "black pimp"). As you can see, this gal's a total basketcase. And though I'd like to be more sympathetic toward her, all she does is whine about how unhappy she is, then allows herself to be spinelessly pulled about by dullards. All the men she meets are either geeks or vermin, and even Delon is a bore—lecturing about Free Love while impressing the lady by telling her that "your toes are like tombstones". Yeah, that line works all the time! Though originally X-rated (probably for brief glimpses of pubic hair), it's mostly artsy anti-passion, with one long psychedelic sex scene that's so blurry you can't make out a thing. Of course, there's plenty of unintentional hilarity, like the fact that Marianne obviously never drove a motorcycle in her life, since all her close-ups are either hokey rear-projection or being towed by the camera truck. But lemme warn you: Despite all the vapid psychobabble, DON'T miss the finale, which had me laughing out loud (for all the wrong reasons) long after the end credits!

SMALL KILL (1991). You have to admire any horror film with the audacity to hire innocuous Gary Burghoff to play a tough-as-nails psycho killer! The idea is sheer genius! I guess his M.A.S.H. residuals had run dry—or maybe he was sick of hanging out with Larry Linville in the welfare line. Well, believe it or not, Burghoff is incredibly creepy as an unshaven, no-conscience dirtbag named Fleck (complete with

a toupee you can spot at 1000 yards) who gets off on kidnapping and ransoming little children. He's so real you can almost smell the lil' bug-eyed fuck. Unfortunately director Rob Fresco doesn't focus only on grubby Gary. Instead he turns the film into a sub-standard, shot-on-video policier featuring an undercover Pacino/Serpico clone who's out to bust the city's drug kingpins (though from the look of their nickel-'n'-dime operation, a paper route would seem more lucrative). Outside of some surprisingly nasty shotgun action (*nice* exploding heads), the cop scenes are barely-watchable, Z-grade tripe, padded out with their repulsive, Long Island domestic lives. Thank god for Gary Burghoff (who, as the end credits explain, actually directed his own scenes!). When he's not terrorizing tots with a straight razor, Fleck is picking up male prostitutes and tying 'em to his bed, or checking out topless shows at ringside and tipping with C-notes. Lemme tell you, the sight of Burghoff getting a lapdance from a busty whore is a cornea-singeing image! Fleck is also involved in the local cocaine trade, thus giving him the opportunity to blow away drug lords who're ripping him off. The script also gives Fleck a Mother Complex, so no grimy cliché is left unwrung. Hell, the whole story makes no sense, but Burghoff is outstanding, giving one of the great, career-decimating performances of all time. The rest of the cast looks like they were plucked from a not-very-successful community theatre troupe, with the exception of Christopher Cooke (Adrienne Shelly's dad in *THE UNBELIEVABLE TRUTH*) as a police captain and Jason Miller (Father Karras from *THE EXORCIST*, nowadays looking more like Father Merrin) as a suburban rummy. Though Miller is second billed, he appears in only two scenes, which is still a couple too many. But this is Burghoff's show through and through! He's the true personification of white-trash evil and the darker side of Radar O'Reilly. Too bad everything else about the film sucks.

THE PUBLIC WOMAN [La Femme Publique] (1984). Director Andrzej Zulawski's work is so disorienting, so disjointed, so packed with crazed, unsympathetic characters, it's no wonder his name only elicits a chorus of "Who?" Barely released and utterly dismissed, this pic lacks the horror of his earlier *POSSESSION*, but it's just as frantic, stylish and perpetually on the brink of incoherency. French sexpot Valerie Kaprisky (*L'ANNEE DES MEDUSES*) stars as Ethel, a young actress who's seduced by a Germanic director (Francis Huster, who wears too much eye liner) to be in his ridiculously hysterical adaptation of Dostoyevsky's "The Possessed". While being hauled through this film within a film, always-lovely-yet-thoroughly-confused Kaprisky is introduced to a Czech dishwasher (Lambert Wilson), and poses as his deceased girlfriend. This gives the two several opportunities to rut, and Ethel is eventually used as a pawn in a political assassination, with her real life taking on striking parallels to her screen role. If this flick sounds like it doesn't make much sense, you're right. And though I kept hoping all this intensely-lensed tedium would come together at the end, the finale simply shudders to a halt, amidst some terribly chic death, pain and madness. Nevertheless, the film held my interest in small part due to the vigorous photography by Sacha Vierny (*THE COOK, THE THIEF...*), and in large part due to the sultry Miss Kaprisky's prurient charms. She saunters about in sheer summer dresses, strips at a moment's notice, and moonlights for several nude photo shoots. In fact, one spectacularly spastic naked dance routine is so enticing that it causes her middle-age photographer to simply keel over. Her character is constantly humiliated and manipulated, running the gamut of emotions—but unlike *POSSESSION*, which was galvanized by Isabelle Adjani's riveting, mad-woman performance, whenever the gorgeous (but talent-barren) Kaprisky bugs out her eyes and goes nutzo, the result is embarrassing. The film ultimately fails because of its lack of an emotional anchor, plus the fact it's so muddled that it makes Greenaway's work look lucid in comparison. Highly recommended for those desperate to catch Kaprisky in the buff, but a hard road for anyone else.

JUST IMAGINE (1930). When I was a kid, Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine constantly ran photos from this science fiction musical comedy, which gave Depression-era audiences a glimpse into the incredible, far off future of 1980! And lemme tell you, these filmmakers certainly captured the '80s with pinpoint inaccuracy. It's like a live action version of *The Jetsons*, with people commuting over New York City in private mini-planes, popping food pills, and visiting automat-like Baby Dispensers. There's kitschy, eye-popping art direction and outrageous special effects galore, but unfortunately, the story and acting is typical, hokey Hollywood nonsense, packed with sappy romance, vaudevillian schtick and instantly-forgettable tunes. Our starring couple, J-21 and LN-18 (a pre-TARZAN Maureen O'Sullivan) are in love, but since all marriages are now arranged by the government (a totalitarian government in the '80s? I guess they pegged the Reagan years after all), J-21 has to prove to the authorities that he's best suited to be her suitor. For comic relief, El Brendel plays a man who's been in a coma for 50 years. After being revived by scientists, he adjusts to his Future Shock by bumbling about and getting drunk on Alcohol Pills. Director David Butler (who also helmed a bunch of saccharine Shirley Temple movies) has a great visual eye, but it stalls whenever some crooning clown bursts into a 5th rate Gershwin melody. But without question, the goofiest parts are when J-21 flies on a secret mission to Mars, with Brendel as a stowaway. Landing on the red planet (sans space helmets or air

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HENDERSON'S

"JUST IMAGINE"

with EL BRENDL

Marjorie White
Frank Albertson

Maureen O'Sullivan
John Garrick

supply, of course), they discover the place is ruled by women and populated by two warring societies of identical twins—one nice, one nasty, and both with ridiculous fashion sense. The men resemble Eastern Bloc wrestlers squeezed into studded swimsuits and spiked afros, their Queen looks like Cyndi Lauper wrapped in aluminum foil, and it culminates in a truly amazing, writhing dance routine that mixes *BUCK ROGERS* with *DANTE'S INFERNO*. It's a riot! Likewise, the flick's art deco overdose is still mighty impressive over 60 years later. Too bad the rest of the movie didn't take the same type of chances, instead resting comfortably on quickly-dated, early talkie clichés.

DANCE HALL RACKET (1952). This ragged, no-budget gem is a gas! And most of the credit goes to Lenny Bruce, who, in between his obscenity trials, penned the ridiculously hard-boiled script and starred as "underdeveloped ape" Vinnie. Most of the action is set at Skully's Dance Emporium, a typical '50s dime-a-dance hall, complete with a flirting floozy at every table. Lenny is the juke joint's muscle, though his hot-headed ways are a little extreme, particularly when he blithely murders a drunken customer ("Big deal, I killed a guy. Does that make me a criminal?"). The police send an undercover cop to the place to investigate the homicide, posing as a sailor and discovering the bosses' smuggling scam which involves a quarter million bucks in stolen gold bullion. Sure, the story is convoluted, but the filmmakers are more interested in piling on cheap sleaze with a backhoe. Vinnie is a total goon (probably modelled on past nightclub cronies Lenny met over the years)—'auditioning' the new girls in their dressing rooms, with the camera taking every opportunity to linger on then-titillating lingerie (and the occasional exposed breast). Bruce is the only actor in sight with a lick of charisma, gleefully stabbing someone in the gut and maintaining a straight face through all the utter cheese. Even when he goes full-blown nutzo during the all-too-brief finale, Lenny's the coolest. And man, does the guy look stoned throughout, or what? But whenever he leaves, the flick turns to incompetent mush. Director Phil Tucker is most notorious for the mind-boggling **ROBOT MONSTER**, but even if there's no gorilla w/space helmet in sight, this pic is close on its heels. Despite its tawdry allure of cheap broads and immoral morons, there's too much unnecessary padding and lame comic relief (still, the flick only clocks in at 65 minutes). The sets are strictly minimalist (the dance hall's bar looks like it was borrowed from the producer's den, and there's nary a bottle in sight) and during the Big Dance Routine (one couple, four left feet) the crowd can't even clap in unison. Co-starring Honey Bruce (a.k.a. Honey Harlow) as a Dance Hall Goil, as well as Lenny's mom, Sally Marr (a.k.a. Salle Marre), doing a dismal Charleston.

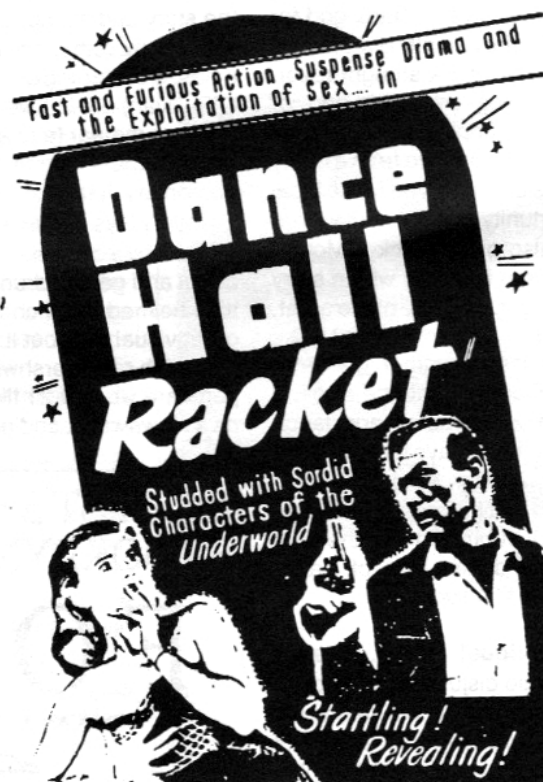
CRUISE MISSILE (1978). This pic was pushed onto me by a friend who claimed it was possibly the worst film ever made, and after enduring this deadening debacle (accompanied by a hearty dinner of Irish whiskey, which didn't even help—that's how terrible it is!), I knew this was a bomb of the highest order. This German/Italian/Spanish production (can you say "Money Laundering"?) might've gotten a nominal release, except that it was also financed by and filmed in Iran, just before Reagan-era tensions hit the boiling point. Nice timing, you morons... The convoluted tale begins in the U.S.S.R., with Russian bigwigs developing their own version of the U.S. cruise missile, which is promptly stolen by perennial Kraut villain, Curt Jergens. John Carradine creeps in as a Soviet rocket scientist—chalking up another one-day gig that makes his Al Adamson outings look like David Lean. And Peter Graves once again cashes in on his **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE** secret-agent-dullard persona in order to play an even more ludicrous secret agent dullard. It's James Bond on a Jim Wynorski budget, with Graves flying to Tehran (at which point, it turns into a virtual Tourist Bureau promotion reel) to save the world from nuclear destruction. Most of the nonsense is filmed in cheezy

hotel rooms, or features Graves endlessly running through pisspoor Moslem villages, playing the Great White Saviour. But Peter ain't no Sean Connery—hell, he's barely even Adam West. I'd feel sympathy for Graves, but he's always crammed his face into any piece of shit, from **POOR WHITE TRASH** to **SAVANNAH SMILES**, in order to pay off his peroxide bills. These 10th-rate spy shenanigans include friendly Russian agents, an assassin with a wristful of razor-sharp knives, stock footage galore, a pro-Iranian sentiment, and unbear-

able tedium—not to mention the suspicion that they forget (or couldn't afford) to film the most expensive hunks of the script. It's also the first (and, thank god, only) espionage film to feature a disco muzak, synthesizer score. The culprit, er, director of this debacle is Leslie Martinson, who spent the '60s helming the **BATMAN** series, and in the '80s sunk to the bottom of the cesspool with Gary Coleman TV-pics like **THE KID WITH THE BROKEN HALO**. A final credit boasts the oddly-phrased "American Scenes shot in Association with Ted V. Mikels"—what'd Ted do, loan 'em his camera for an afternoon?... Everyone involved in this celluloid stool should share the blame. It's obvious that nobody was even trying, and though crammed with unintentional giggles, it still sucks.

LEWD LIZARD (1985). I can't imagine this Hong Kong production ever being financed in America. What the hell would the filmmakers say to the potential backers? "Well, it's about a psycho who trains lizards to crawl up womens' vaginas and kill 'em." I think not... But that's exactly what we get in this unflinching, terrifically

repellant flick directed by Wang Hsuing and Wai Wang. It's crammed with misogynistic thrills and copious nudity, and it begins with Norman Chu as an average guy whose girlfriend marries a wealthy shitheel. Feeling betrayed, the guy gets shitface drunk, is beaten up by her hubbie's henchmen, and goes mad with hokey visions of murder. He's got a foul plan for revenge against the entire female population, which begins by collecting tiny, six-inch-long lizards from the beach and is followed by a crime spree involving women's panties. Chu begins stealing dirty underwear, leading to a hilariously lurid montage of women in various states of undress—in showers, at the beach, having sex—with this nutcase reaching through windows and snagging their undies. After this, Chu goes to his make-shift lab, with this Nutty Professor using his collection of vaginal secretions to create a formula which, when injected into lizards, makes 'em crave womens' privates. Are you still following me? From here on in, it gets severely rude and ridiculous, as Chu goes on his sadistic, anti-woman campaign. He sneaks into apartments, incapacitates his victim, unleashes his vial full of horny li'l lizards, and cackles maniacally as the women go into spasms of alternating pleasure and agony while the creatures wriggle inside them, until they finally perish. Chu chews the scenery with aplomb (promising "I make you happy" before unleashing his pets on one gal), and even when the whacko's life takes a turn for the better, he's got shitty luck. For example, when he finally falls for a woman, she discovers his cache of lizards while boating and immediately pours them down her bikini bottoms (!), becoming just another orgasm overdose victim. As you can surmise, this pic wouldn't exactly be a favorite of N.O.W.'s, with its unapologetically hateful attitude toward the distaff cast, who die in



record numbers. Then again, nobody in this pic is likable—the men are sleazy or deranged, the women are vapid or manipulative, and after awhile I found myself rooting only for the poor lizards. This is pure, crude, rotgut exploitation, packed with demented charms.

FIGHTING MAD (1976). Nearly two decades ago, long before cranking out P.C.-Lite dramas like *PHILADELPHIA*, director Jonathan Demme was on the payroll of Roger Corman's New World Pictures, spewing out high-octane slop like *CAGED HEAT* and *ANGELS HARD AS THEY COME*. This pic, one of his last drive-in efforts, belongs in that tiny, but usually atrocious genre of '70s Redneck Revenge Melodramas. It works as precisely as a Swiss watch, and though the story wasn't cathartic enough for the drooling, low-brow action crowd, this is without question the best of a mediocre lot. The brightest idea was casting ex-EASY RIDER Peter Fonda as our country hero. Because even when Fonda is kickin' ass like any Buford Pusser clone, his liberal roots still linger in the viewer's memory—thus keeping the right-wing, vigilante bullshit to a tolerable level. It's one of Peter's better roles, though soon afterward, he fell into late-night-cable swill like *MERCENARY FIGHTERS* and *HIGH BALLIN'*. As for the plot, it's Hardworking Landowners vs. Evil Corporate Shitheels time again—with old fashioned American values vs. greedy scumbags. When family man Fonda and his neighbors refuse to sell their farms and have the land turned into a coal strip mine, the company men begin invading homes and killing off all the uncooperative crackers. The sheriff's on the take, so the citizens have to take the law into their own hands, led by the hot-headed Fonda, who grabs his bow and arrow and goes after the fatcat industrialists. Though occasionally dumb as dirt and hideously manipulative, the pic's righteous indignation is contagious—wringing sympathy out of an old woman kicked off her land and family members killed in cold blood. Meanwhile, Demme tries to rise (slightly) above his material by focusing on the day to day farm life, neighborly camaraderie and local ambiance—never forgetting to toss in the occasional brutal, gratuitous killing in order to keep his audience from dozing off after one too many Tall Boys. His effort was virtually wasted, because the movie was dumped into one-week-only double bills by 20th Century Fox weasels. Co-starring Scott Glenn as Peter's amiable brother (who, following the standard revenge narrative, doesn't make it past the first reel) and Lynn Lowry (*THEY CAME FROM WITHIN*, *SUGAR COOKIES*) as Fonda's doe-eyed squeeze.

VAPORS (1965). Director Andy Milligan has made many strange, horrible movies in his time, including horror bores like *THE GHASTLY ONES* and *THE BODY BENEATH*. But this, one of his earliest works, is a total time trip back to the halcyon days of pre-AIDS Queer Cinema. And though different from anything else he's done, it's (arguably) his most perfectly realized work. This unflinching underground short depicts one man's journey to a Times Square gay steam bath, and though never approaching hardcore level, it must've knocked '60s audiences for a loop with its grainy, b&w ultra-realism. Most films during that era depicted gays as prancing, effeminate jokes (i.e. *STAIRCASE*, featuring Richard Burton and Rex Harrison, both of whom should've been pushed down one after making that bomb), so even if this pic gets ludicrously heavyhanded at times, it also has an honesty that made it a long-playing fave on the Mens' circuit...Not much happens during the 30 minutes. Our protagonist leaves all his valuables at the door, grabs a towel, picks a tiny cubicle, and awaits the usual anonymous encounter. This time around, he meets a nervous new friend who's paying his first visit to the baths and is unsure of etiquette. And while exchanging a little small talk before getting down to business, the two meet plenty of giggling, limp-wristed fags (the place is dubbed an "insane asylum for mad homosexuals") and expose a few family secrets (one's married and still closeted, on a much-needed vacation from Hetero Hell—bitching

about his wife's curlers and bunion-encrusted feet). Both of the leads (Robert Dahdah and Gerald Jaccuzzo) are quite effective, and the production has the feel of an Off-Off-Broadway one act play, with its single set and character-driven simplicity. Plus, Milligan must've shot the thing in an honest-to-goodness steam bath, because I doubt anyone could've faked all the wonderfully rude graffiti covering the walls. This is a true artifact of a lost era, made by one of the schlockworld's most idiosyncratic "talents". Check it out back-to-back with Milligan's adorably-sleazy *FLESHPOT ON 42nd STREET*.

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'THE BRICK DOLLHOUSE'

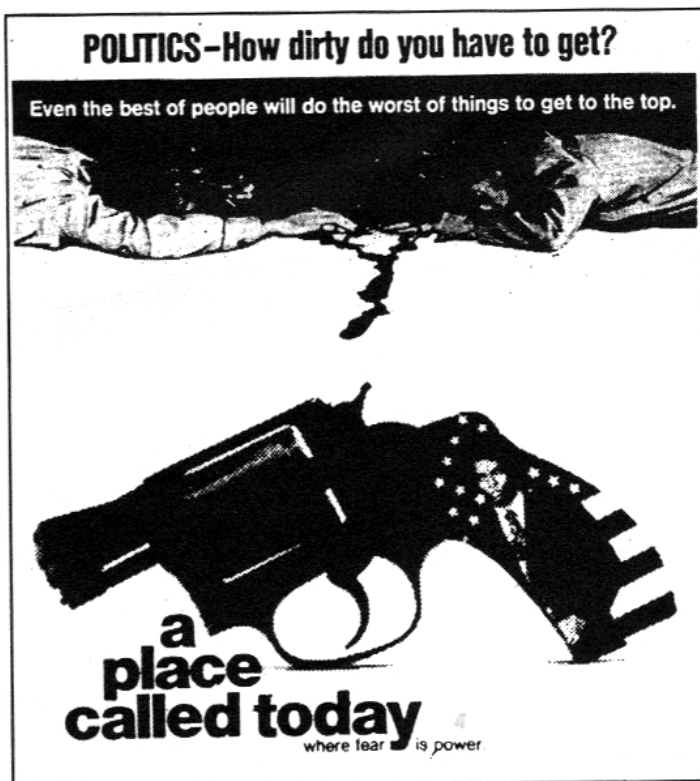


DEATH SCENES 2 (1992). The first *DEATH SCENES* was a cool tour of early 20th century crime photography, hosted by satanist/raconteur Anton LaVey. The sequel picks up with the second half of this century, but takes a more unfocused, toss-in-every-gross-thing-we-can-find approach. This is another field day for the grim at heart, beginning with brutal WWII footage, rotted P.O.W.'s, and assorted atrocities. Meanwhile, back in the U.S., we get a barrage of morgue shots, from early gangland hits to modern-day drive-bys. We soon realize just how desperate director Nick Bougas was, stitching any and all death footage into the loose framework, from Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, to grisly '50s Driver's Ed films, to the assassinations of Kennedy and King—accompanied by bland, whitebread narration, reiterating facts that even a slow third-grader should know. An hour into it we finally get to the good stuff, including mass murderers Albert DeSalvo, Richard Speck and Charles Whitman. And though the video box blazes Charles Manson's name in bold type, only eight fuckin' minutes are devoted to the guy. They're also the best moments of the entire film, including news footage of the courtroom and disgusting, close-up autopsy shots of the victims, including Sharon Tate. The filmmakers also dig up plenty of celebrity death pix, such as a bloated Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield hanging from her totalled car, Lenny Bruce dead in his bathroom, plus multiple views of Vic Morrow's *TWILIGHT ZONE* decap, including a grim, frame-by-frame look at the impact. And what would a film about modern-day celeb demises be without Bud Dwyer, who blew the back of his head off during a press conference (you'll never believe how much blood can gush out of a dead man's nose). Despite several repulsive bits—most of which I've seen elsewhere—this is generic, straight-to-video sludge. If you're looking for mortality in large doses, this is better than the overrated *FACES OF DEATH* (at least all this shit is real), but it lacks the sly, subversive wit that made Part One a real find.

LIFEPACK/PATH/CROSSMATCH/CURRENT. (Andreas Troger, 15 Jones St. 3D, New York, NY 10014. Fax:212-366-5382). This quartet of German-lensed short films—each only 15 minutes—tackles a wide variety of harsh, provocative subjects, and proves that Andreas Troger is one of the finest, grittiest young filmmakers on the independent circuit. The documentary **LIFEPACK** (1990) takes us into the life of an emergency ambulance team, scouring the city streets after dark and dealing with fractures, heart attacks, drunken fisticuffs, and the full range of human pain. The gorgeous black and white photography captures all the nastiness of their job, right down to hauling naked, cellulite-packed bodies and dealing with whiny, unwilling patients. The best of the quartet, **PATH** (1991) also sets its sights within the medical profession, but this item is for strong stomachs only, as we get a matter-of-fact look into the daily routine of a hospital pathology lab. As the workers talk about their profession, we watch as they weigh body parts, stretch out intestines, scoop out brains, and even conduct a full human dissection. The most difficult moment to watch is an autopsy of a newborn infant—which is both gross beyond belief, and depressing as hell. Full of naked, unappealing corpses, buckets of guts, and tales of how their job has affected their personal life (i.e. losing friends), this slickly lensed tidbit takes a sick subject and tackles it with surprising grace and intelligence. For **CROSSMATCH** (1992), Troger brings his talents to a science fiction tale, featuring a power-hungry corporation that's built a rep on finding donors for organ transplants. When we learn their larger plans involve automated abortions and sacrificed babies, it enters Cronenberg-esque territory, with a high-tech nightmare of a future that's just around the corner. This cruel vision needs a longer running time though, since the characters are underdeveloped and the story too disjointed—it seems more like a test reel for a larger work. Finally we have the more avant garde **CURRENT** (1992), which incorporates surreal images for its examination into the nature of electro-shock treatment. It's an unpleasant li'l romp, which first explains the technical side of voltage, amperage, et cetera, and then shows us how electricity is used in prison executions and medical 'treatment'...Troger uses his films to approach subjects that we usually turn away from; while his crisp, clean technique brings a unique sense of humanity to the darker, more rancid recesses of life and death. His work cuts deep and leaves lingering scars.

A PLACE CALLED TODAY (1972). This celluloid curio tries to have it every which way. Though loaded with heavy social messages about urban revolution, it's also layered with sexist swill, rotgut rhetoric, and a straight-faced (albeit clueless) cast. Director Don Schain (who previously padded his bankbook by helming the **GINGER** exploitation series) tries for hard-hitting topicality, but the guy can't seem to shake his sleazy roots—mixing sex, politics, sex, racial unrest, sex, violence, and sex into this howl-a-rama. J. Herbert Kerr Jr. (yeah, I know...Who?) stars as Randy Johnson, an angry black rebel with an insidious plan to get elected Mayor. In order to win over voters, Randy promises to end the recent rise in Urban Terrorism, but little do the people know, their candidate is actually the kingpin behind the violence! But even though Randy is responsible for the murder and arson, he doesn't look that bad in comparison to the dirty-dealing, white, fatcat politicians. On the distaff side, Lana Wood provides some visual excitement as a gorgeous debutante who's prone to spewing revolutionary banter like she's on methedrine, and Cheri Caffero co-stars as the current Mayor's frequently nekkid daughter. At its heart this is cut-rate urban soap opera—the filmmaker's sympathies clearly lying with the clean-cut establishment, such as a macho reporter who suspects the truth behind the 'random' bombings. And though Randy would've been a ballsy hero if Melvin Van Peebles had been behind the camera, here he's just proof that corruption begets even worse corruption, with Randy eventually kidnapping Cheri on election eve. But despite all this potentially-kinetic

material, the flick is often as boring as a real political election. The final 15 minutes however, are truly vicious (including a prolonged rape), but in these white-bread moviemakers' hands, Goodness and Niceness always win out. Pass the No-Doz please...This **PLACE** is total cheese, laced with twisted melodrama and wicked stereotypes. As one female revolutionary proclaims, "I'll steal for it, fuck for it, kill for it, and die for it." Well, at least she didn't claim she'd act for it...



AMERICA'S DEADLIEST HOME VIDEO (1992). What a brilliant high-concept for a no-budget video! This black comedy about an average jerk who's kidnapped by a band of thrill-seeking criminals is totally shot with a camcorder's P.O.V.—the footage left raw and unedited—thus allowing director/writer Jack Perez to shoot with a minimum of technical finesse. And though instant comparisons can be made to the Belgium shocker/comedy **MAN BITES DOG**, this indie pic was the first in the can. Even stranger is the fact it stars ex-PARTRIDGE FAMILY gnome Danny Bonaduce, and the little bastard is actually good! He stars as Dougie, your basic schmuck who uses his camcorder as a personal diary, annoying everyone around him. But when he learns his wife is screwing around, he takes his camera and begins a cross country odyssey, taping his adventures and every insipid thought. When he runs into a trio of two-bit felons, they take Dougie along with them, so he can capture their rural crime spree for posterity. These convenience store hoodlums with delusions of grandeur consist of Clint, their macho leader, a sexy blonde named Gloria, and bitchy black sadist Verna. And although Dougie is initially nervous, he soon ingratiates himself into the crew as he's pulled deeper and deeper into their lifestyle. Now, all of this could've easily turned into an obvious, My-Aren't-We-Clever caper, but the filmmakers keep a straight face throughout the shit-for-brains comic adventures. And the constantly-running camera captures more than just their fumbling crimes—we get cheap hotel rooms, picnics, bowlings alleys, S&M games, smoking weed (which they pilfer from a zonked out clerk), and plenty of internal bickering. The razor-edged fun continues right up to the spectacularly downbeat finale, becoming the perfect satire of the COPS generation. Co-starring Mick Wymhoff, Mollena Williams and Melora Walters as the gang of three, this is a rare treat—a video that's more clever than it has any right to be.

LA GRANDE BOUFFE (1973). This artsy dementia was originally brought to U.S. shores by Allen Klein, the moneyman behind *EL TOPO* and *THE HOLY MOUNTAIN*, but even if this production doesn't reach those surreal heights, it's close—nothing new for director Marco Ferreri, who gave us *THE LAST WOMAN, BYE BYE MONKEY* and *TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS*. It begins realistically enough, with a quartet of bored, rich, middle-aged guys (Marcello Mastroianni, Michel Piccoli, Philippe Noiret, Ugo Tognazzi—all top-billed stars in Europe at the time) hiding out in an old mansion for a "gourmet seminar". First, they load up the kitchen with enough food to keep an army alive, including whole deer, sides of beef, live capons, et cetera. And when they finally sit down and begin eating, you realize that even though they might take an occasional break, these guys are obsessed with preparing food and cramming it down their throats. When a trio of prostitutes (plus a local school-teacher, who everyone ends up shitting) come over for a sumptuous dinner, it quickly evolves into an all-out celebration of food and sex. They screw on the couches, fart at great length, and most of all eat, eat, eat, with these obsessive, pigish nutcases searching for hedonistic thrills within their culinary microcosm. Though all this can be interpreted as an absurd commentary on today's society, with food symbolizing consumerism in every form, I prefer to think of it as a gloriously repulsive ode to overindulgence. They just keep eating, even though they're not hungry. Even though they can barely swallow another bite. Even though they're vomiting, sick from too much food. It's all so gross you can't help but laugh at its deadpan style, as they matter-of-factly shovel food into each other's mouths. The first half of the film is slow, but Ferreri hits his stride during the middle sections, achieving a black comedy glow—only to turn dour by the end with an appropriate (if not exactly slap-happy) finale. Though unquestionably the greatest cinematic feast of all time, the film itself sputters along on the cast's gusto and Marco's sick plot twists, with plenty of dead air in between...One word of warning: Do NOT begin watching this pic on an empty stomach. I did, and twenty minutes into it, I started rummaging through my kitchen and found myself stuck with only a dusty box of Macaroni & Cheese, half an onion, and a freezer-burnt Eggo.

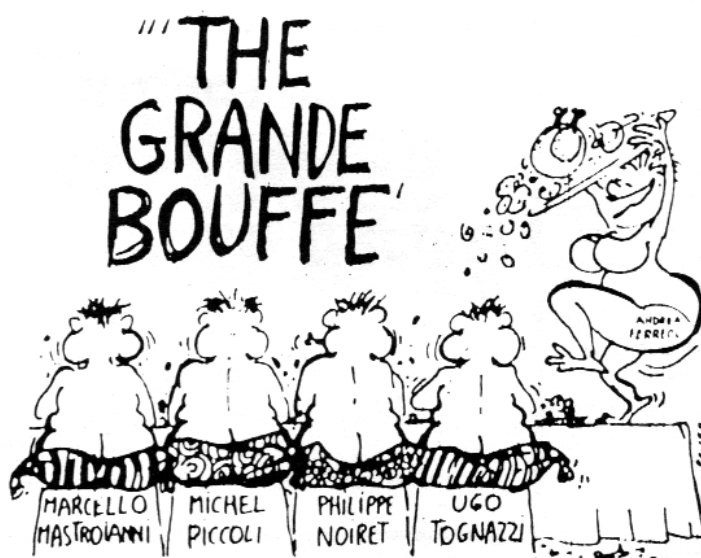
REVENGE OF BILLY THE KID (1997). This is a warped film. Mind you, it's not very good, but it's so sick that I tried to ignore its modest deficiencies—such as stupidity, predictability, and long-windedness (despite running only 90 minutes). Mainly, director Jim Groom paints a wonderfully unflattering portrait of U.K. farm life, giving us characters who are dirty, farting, nose-picking (did I forget to mention, piss drunk?) cretins living out their miserable, backward lives on some In-Bred Island, where the main bi-products are Mud and Shit and Farm Animals. Our featured family is The McDonalds, who're so devoid of originality they've named all their children Ronald (get it?). The only member of the clan you've got any sympathy for is pretty young sis, Ronnie (Samantha Perkins), whose only wish is to get off of this barren rock. The crude humor takes a twist toward serious derangement when Dad gets amorous and fucks a goat (off screen, thank you), and for an instant it's as if Peter Jackson was directing *THE BEVERLY HILLBILLIES*. The film shifts gears when Mrs. Goat

suddenly gives birth to a Pan-Like half-goat/half-man creature, and while most of the family doesn't take to the infant (calling it "a festering lump of mutated shit," to be precise), Ronnie cares for it and names it Billy. The little thing grows remarkably fast (Enter: One latex-covered dwarf wearing a goat's head), but Dad is so grossed out that he murders his freak 'son' and dumps the corpse in a stream. Of course, the ol' codger was a little premature, because Billy ain't really dead, and now he's really pissed off (hence the title). By the time he takes his revenge, Billy's grown into a seven-foot-tall monster, who likes to slash family members with his claws—and my fave bit o' violence is when a guy is hung from a meathook thru his chin (I hate it when that happens, don't you?). Though the idea of a giant Goat Man might not seem too terrifying, the f/x guys do a nice job in giving the creature a demonic edge. The pic as a whole has a schizophrenic

edge (the obligatory romance is a total waste of film stock), yet it's difficult not to dig a movie that features rotten-toothed dirtbags and scatological humor as its intellectual backbone. In other words, it's a mess, but so ugly and raunchy you quickly fall under its double-digit I.Q. charms.

EVIL DEAD TRAP [Formation of the Dead Ghost] (1990) and HIDEKI: EVIL DEAD TRAP 2 (1991). Though linked under the same *EVIL DEAD TRAP* banner (at least for western distribution), both of these Japanese horror films are separate entities. What they have in common is the fact they each take an old fashioned ghost tale and ladle on state of

the art gore and erotic sadism. The first, directed by Seishu Ikeda, stars Miyuki Ono as the petite hostess of "Nami's Late Night"—an insomniac-aimed TV program that showcases viewers' home videos. Just as Nami is getting tired of the same old crap in her mailbox every day, she receives a mysterious snuff film, in which a terrified, bound woman is sliced up on camera. It concludes with a hyper-disgusting close-up of her eyeball torn down the middle and gushing fluid. Of course, Nami is intrigued, and when she figures out where the murder took place, she convinces a carload of co-workers (all women, except for one unnecessary guy) to investigate. Their destination: An abandoned warehouse populated by maggots, snakes and an obviously-sinister, hooded murderer. And what's the first thing our protagonists do? As if they'd never seen a *FRIDAY THE 13TH* movie before, these nitwits split up, roam about, and are savagely butchered, one by one. Despite a structure we've seen all too many times, the filmmakers put a stylish spin on the old genre mechanisms, along with an Argento-level love for razor-edged weapons and imaginatively conceived slaughter. Even though the outcome is convoluted (an infant demon named Hideki is behind this grisly rollercoaster ride, but there's little discernable reason for it all), the journey getting there is mighty impressive. It's difficult to find a truly scary movie nowadays, and this one succeeds with its fluid direction and claustrophobic camerawork methodically unleashing a world of disturbing, hidden horrors...The 'sequel' has no connection with the first, except that it features a demon named Hideki as well as a female TV celebrity. The plot revolves around a pair of girlfriends. Aki is a plain, overweight woman who feeds her misanthropic ways by working as a movie projectionist. But after work, she secretly gets dolled up like a East 12th Street whore, teases on the desperate men, and (seemingly) ends her evening by eviscerating a young

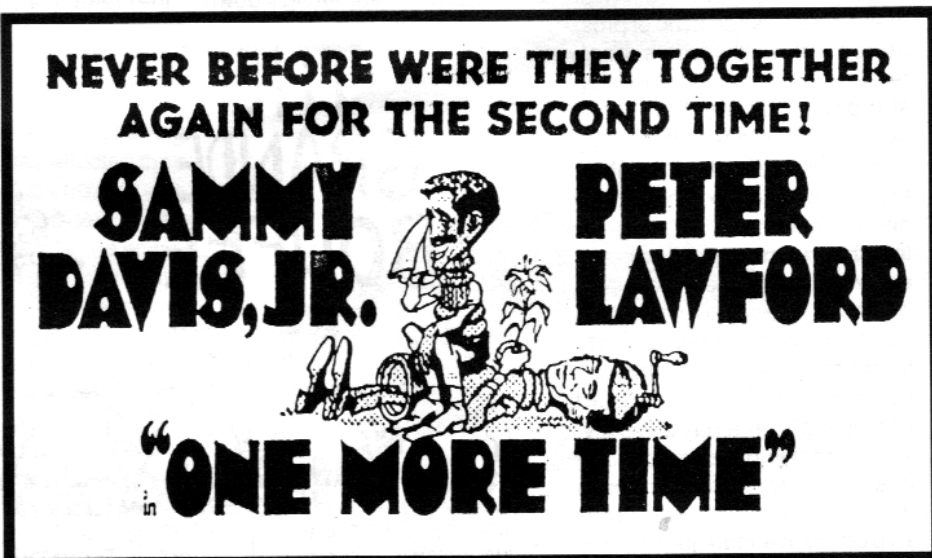


woman and slicing out her stomach. Her best friend is pretty Ami, a teen singing sensation turned TV news reporter. When Ami begins covering the series of grisly murders (no skimping on the spilt guts), she finds herself sexually aroused by the sight of the savaged corpses. While the first TRAP followed standard narrative routes, this one is more of a blood-drenched dual character study, and though it begins slow, a prevailing creepiness holds tight. Each woman is pulled deeper and deeper into this perverse murder spree, with Aki stalked by the evil child demon Hideki—or perhaps all the blame can be placed on psychosis from an old abortion? (I could've done without this sudden appearance of a vomitable, right-wing stance.) There are some surprising character twists along the way, and the final 15 minutes is a knockout nightmare that's graphic, painful and admirably somber. Both of the leads (Youko Nakagima and Rie Kondou) do a good job with their broadly painted characters, and director Isou Hashimoto keeps the gore effectively restrained—allowing it to punctuate the story instead of drown it...Each film has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, and though I enjoyed the more linear (not to mention grotesque) Part One, each film wades gleefully into its tawdry territory—again proving that Japan is on the cutting edge of modern horror.

EAT THE DOCUMENT (1972). This rambling, near-incoherent documentary stars Bob Dylan at his hairiest, and was perpetrated by producer D.A. Pennebaker, who was still riding high from the success of *DON'T LOOK BACK*, his first collaboration with Mr. Zimmerman. This hour-long follow-up isn't in the same league though, and it seems more like a shoddy warm-up for Dylan's epic miasma, *RENALDO AND CLARA*. Unfortunately, it lacks the high pretension level that made *R&C* such a muddled masterpiece, and rather than explore Bob's labyrinthine brainpan, this pic is happy to simply film guy without much rhyme or reason. Essentially it's a tour film, following Dylan and his equally spaced entourage (including The Band) through England in 1966. Any concert footage is frustrating though, because it's shot like the crew was stoned, the cameraman half blind, and the editor just plain inept (oops, the editor was Bob himself), with classics such as "Like a Rolling Stone" getting barely a verse before moving onto some other stultifying encounter. Later, we get Dylan stuck in his hotel room, while mobs of fans wait in the street. But unlike The Beatles phenomenon, instead of screaming, teenage girls, Dylan's fans are spectacted, pimply-faced schoolboys and unwashed hippies. There's even a lame attempt at spontaneous wackiness (a la The Fab Four) when Bob roams through the city, looking lost and trying to pick up a young lass (with her boyfriend present, no less). And in Pennebaker's dumbest move, he includes only a short clip of Dylan's infamous backside car ride with John Lennon. But the most frightening moment is the sight of Johnny Cash, looking deathly-thin and haggard from cramming most of Bolivia up his sinuses, joining Bob in a duet of "I Still Miss Someone". Even the interviews with Bob are surprisingly dull. A prime example: When a reporter asks why he came to England, he replies "I just go where I'm supposed to go." Man, the guy might be a genius, but this film certainly doesn't capture it. It's as if Dylan & Pennabaker just slapped the footage together—clipping sentences and songs—content in the fact his rabid fans would sit through anything. For completists only.

ONE MORE TIME (1970). This comedy stars Peter Lawford and Sammy Davis Jr. as nightclub owners named Salt and Pepper, and asks the question, "Just how funny is a Black man in England?"

Evidently Jerry Lewis, the director, thought it was enough, that it was worth more than a few yocks to have Sammy continually confronting the stiff British upper lip. Lawford plays Christopher Pepper, as well as his own evil twin brother, Lord Sydney Pepper, and Sammy is Charlie Salt—definitely a master stroke of irony. Faced with a huge fine or imprisonment for some nightclub-related transgression, they go to the nasty brother for money, and he refuses them. When he later turns up dead, Lawford, as Chris, decides to impersonate him, a fact he neglects to mention to his partner, Charlie/Sammy, when he asks him to come work for him. After a funeral with scantily clad chorus girl/mourners and a fight scene in which a righteous Sammy, the purple lining of his tux flashing, flails around like the guy in the old Hai Karate ad, we go to the rich brother's mansion. Part of the



mansion looks like it's straight out of Scooby-Doo, with the other half a swingin' pad, with a riotous color scheme of purple and yellow. Here we get to see Sammy do extreme double takes to an operatic crescendo. You'd think he was seeing Rosemary's Baby until the camera shows—A four-poster bed! An enormous fireplace! We also catch a glimpse of a soulful Sammy wandering around singing in flared pants and then there's yet another Rich-People-At-An-Incredibly-Long-Dinner-Table sight gag! (This almost deserves its own genre.) Probably the best scene is when Sammy goes to a veddy, veddy English costume ball as the Chocolate Dandy, with Sammy trying to come off as a black Danny Kaye. For instance, he takes a pinch of snuff, tries not to sneeze, and is most unsuccessful just as a waiter brings a whipped cream-laden cake near some snooty guests. Just guess what happens (I don't want to ruin the surprise). Following this, Sammy gets another nightclub-type number (must have been in his contract) with Tom Thumb and His Fickle Fingers, where he's suddenly in tight leather pants, white shirt, medallions, the whole bit, shaking a tambourine and growling about what's gonna happen when the feeling hits you. Just as suddenly, the party becomes the Albert Hall and the uptight twits storm the stage, overwhelmed by Sammy's grooviness. Cut to Sammy in the library, looking for a copy of Ebony, when it's back to the Scooby-Doo set, as a bookcase/secret panel leads him to a scary underground lab. Here the plot gets a little hazy (or maybe I do). There are some bad guys, missing diamonds, a fox hunt, a Dragon Lady, and some other stuff happens, but they decide enough's enough because it's Happy Hour. To the strains of "One More Time", our two heroes take an easy out with the cheap tactic of ending the movie by stepping out of character and talking directly to the audience. (That's you, baby.) summing up the plot and tying up loose ends. Crosby and Hope they ain't. —Mary Karam

THE CYCLE SAVAGES (1969). Often referred to as one of the nastiest biker flicks to emerge from the glory days of that drive-in genre, it's anti-socially amusing and a notch above the pack, though nowhere near the classics (which includes virtually anything featuring Jack, Dennis or Peter). The ever-scurvy Bruce Dern stars as Keeg, the unshaven, unwashed leader of a typical gang of hairball bikers. And Chris Robinson co-stars as straight-laced local artist Romko, who likes to illustrate the gang's brawls in his sketchpad. Of course, Keeg doesn't appreciate this notoriety, especially since it legally implicates his boys in all their crimes. This flick wastes no time in getting down 'n' dirty, because only ten minutes in, Dern is torturing Romko, beating the crap out of him and slicing him up with a straight razor. But while Romko is recuperating he falls for Lea (Melody Patterson), a pretty neighbor who also happens to be one of Keeg's ex-squeezes (does this dweeb have bad luck, or what?). And when Romko hardheadedly continues his artwork—including demure nude drawings of Lea—Keeg decides to stop him from “sounding off with his hands” by crushing them in a vice or simply chopping ‘em clean off! Without question, the crassest bits involves the “initiation” of a buxom new femme into their sty, featuring a tortuous gang bang, after which they dose her with Acid (alas, no colorful hallucination FX for '60s throwbacks). Director Bill Brame (FREE GRASS) lends no surprises or style to any of this swill, giving us a film as blunt as its one-dimensional characters. The men are slugs, the women are meat, the leads (who we're supposed to have sympathy for? I didn't) are dumb as stumps, but at least Dern is around to conjure up another rotten-to-the-core cretin. Bruce is the perfect thug, having spent the '60s playing every villainous fuckhead in Tinseltown (until he sobered up and signed onto studio pabulum like *WON TON TON*, *THE DOG WHO SAVED HOLLYWOOD* or the detestable anti-drug TV-movie *TOUGHLOVE*), and he's terrific as always as the leader of this ragtag band of miscreants—even if his gang only consists of about five guys. The rest of the cast sucks, with Ms. Patterson's nude scenes conveniently obscured, and radio clown Casey Kasem popping up as Keeg's pimp brother (yeah, right). Though only 82 minutes long, the pic's padded to the brim (lotsa shots of the gang riding around, accompanied by generic rock muzak), but Dern's scene-spewing makes it a keeper nevertheless.

MOTHER [a.k.a. UP YOUR TEDDY BEAR, THE TOY GRABBERS] (1970). What alternate dimension did this thing seep out of? On the surface, it looks like just another shitty TV movie, featuring '60s sitcom celeb Wally Cox, and out-of-work BATMAN super-villains Victor Buono and Julie Newmar. But this outlandish sex farce would never make it to prime time—then or now. Director/writer Don Joslyn packs the proceedings with starlet wannabees in every state of undress, and the three leads struggle with the most embarrassing roles of their lives. Ms. Newmar stars as “Mother”, the sexy top exec of the money-grubbing Mother Knows Best Toy Company, and after encountering timid dollmaker Cox, she plots to exploit his innocent ideas for massive profit. Buono is along for the ride as Newmar's

infantile aid Skippy—a child trapped in the body of a grotesque, lardassed adult. At its worst, the film has all the pathetic charm of *LOVE, AMERICAN STYLE*, but there's always an underlying level of twisted sexuality at work. You see, even though Cox is smitten by Newmar (and her skimpy black bikini) at first sight, the li'l guy's Oedipal Complex gets in the way whenever he's aroused. Wally's also a bit of a lecher during his free time, stalking various pretty young things around the city. And his adolescent-fueled fantasies are a hoot: Would you believe Wally in a high chair with diapers, being chastised by Newmar's “Mother”. Or how about peeking at “Mother” in her undies? Eventually Buono gets jealous of Newmar's attention to Wally, and decides to murder the guy... That's about it of the plot,

and though deadeningly unfunny, it's always weird enough to keep you running to the fridge for another beer. Newmar is appealing as the calculating bitch—and anyone who got off on her old Catwoman wardrobe will love her array of skimpy fashions. Buono and Cox simply play poster children for Abnormal Psychology. Victor mugs voraciously and sweats like a chunk of bad pork, and wait until you see him in drag, attempting to pick up Wally. As for Mr. Peepers, he simply twitches from start to finish, awe-struck and tongue-tied at the slightest sight of cleavage. Co-starring Angelique Pettyjohn, with music and songs by Quincy Jones, this totally wrongheaded comedy is only worth a look to see the stars frantically dog-paddling in an effort to keep their careers afloat.

SATANIS, THE DEVIL'S MASS (1970).

This solid profile of America's favorite devil worshipper, Anton Szandor LaVey, works as a persuasive recruiting film for his Church of Satan. Director Ray Laurent gets full cooperation from LaVey, and begins with a typical black mass, complete with nude female altar, masked followers, and ol' Anton looking downright adorable with his devil-horned cowl and goatee. After these frivolities, LaVey gets down to the business of explaining his past, lifestyle and beliefs, as we're taken on a tour of his pitch black, San Francisco home (decorated with cool shit like a tombstone coffee table). His basic idea was to form a religion based on carnal desires, and his selfish, greedy, lustful minions follow the old “Do What Thou Wilt” philosophy—taking mankind's innate sexual perversity and flaunting it in public. Even if you don't agree with his doctrine, you have to admit that Anton's ceremonies have a tawdry theatrical air, with bare-assed minions flogged atop a coffin, plus a naked, droopy-breasted dame with “666” written across her chest and a human skull in her crotch. The cameraman swoops about the proceedings and fiddles with the zoom lens in a misguided attempt to disorient the viewer—after a while, I wanted to break the guy's legs so he'd stay put for a while. Many of Anton's disciples are interviewed, including his wife and daughter, and though intelligent and eloquent, they also seem a tad naive. But they're all Rhodes Scholars in comparison to LaVey's pathetic, pin-headed neighbors, who whine about the sinister shenanigans, not to mention his pet lion, Togare. And of course, the filmmakers toss in a fossilized minister to criticize Anton's reprobate teachings. The pic is a little long-winded for viewers in search of cheap, Mondo-esque thrills, and you have to have a high

THE WILDEST BUNCH OF THE 70's!

ROARING THROUGH THE STREETS
ON CHOPPED DOWN HOGS!

They steal women...
initiate them into the
pack... sell them
on the black
market of crime!



tolerance for bullshit in order to keep a straight face. Because despite his flock's witchy dogma, if you break this "religion" down to its essentials, it's just a bunch of social misfits who want to take off their clothes, fuck each other, and use the Church as a demonic singles bar (nothing wrong with that, as far as I'm concerned). And though a quarter century ago Anton LaVey was a bizarre aberration, today he seems like a pioneer in the fields of sex and anarchy.

REMEMBER MY NAME (1978). Alan Rudolph is one of the most fascinatingly erratic directors working in the U.S. today. Though his career began with horror crapola like *BARN OF THE NAKED DEAD*, he soon became an Altman protege (and occasional wannabee) with his most original work including *CHOOSE ME*, *TROUBLE IN MIND* and *EQUINOX*. Even studio sell-outs like *ROADIE* (remember Meat Loaf's one and only starring role? Didn't think so) were laced with wry moments. This film is one of his most stylish, darkest works—so of course it's not available on video. A modern film noir featuring Geraldine Chaplin (who looks so anorexic you're worried she'll snap like a breadstick) as Emily, a dark-hearted femme fatale recently released from a 12-year gig in the slammer. The lady's on a mission now, with the always underrated Anthony Perkins as her prey. But Rudolph doesn't show his hand too quickly. He prefers to let this tale percolate for awhile, with Tak Fujimoto's disorienting cinematography and Alberta Hunter's evocative blues score setting the mood. Perkins plays a happily-married construction worker, and Chaplin turns his middle-class existence inside out—peering into his windows at night, ripping up his flower beds, terrorizing his wife, and smashing up his car. Of course, there's an axe to grind from the past, and Chaplin has delusions that Perkins is gonna dump his current missus for her. Though this might sound like just another *FATAL ATTRACTION*-esque story, with a scorned woman stalking an ex-lover, there's much more to it than just that. Chaplin isn't some '90s psychobitch cliché—she's an icy seductress who's alternately sad, weird, hysterical, and manipulative. And instead of protecting home and hearth, Perkins falls prey to his past—picking up his old, drunken habits and wearing them like a shroud. As usual, Rudolph pulls off some wonderfully offbeat moments, like a cocktail lounge encounter during which Tony and Geraldine work their way down the Drink List alphabetically. The supporting cast includes 'newcomers' Tim Thomerson (*TRANCERS*), Alfre Woodard, and Jeff Goldblum as a King Nerd, complete with greased hair and pocket protector...*REMEMBER MY NAME* worms its way into your subconscious like an old, familiar love song played on a barroom jukebox—lingering in the smoky air, long after the tune is over.

✓1964 PINOCCHIO: SCREAMS OF THE BLASPHEMY (199?). I don't know what type of drugs these young Japanese filmmakers are taking nowadays, but I wanna get some, pronto. This celluloid maelstrom is in a league with *TETSUO*, and though not as angst-driven as its predecessor, director Shozin Fukui's wild, dark-hued fantasy is unlike anything currently produced on U.S. shores. Since my copy of the flick didn't have any subtitles, I lost many of the subtleties (like the plot), at first attributing my confusion on the cheap wine I'd been inhaling all night. Needless to say, I found it difficult to

synopsise, but here I go...A mental patient with a unique hairdo (a cross between a skinhead and Alfalfa from *The Li'l Rascals*) is discarded from his surrealistic, sadistic hospital/prison and taken in by a young woman. Turns out the guy is some type of lab-created sex toy, and since he has the word Pinocchio tattooed across his back, that's what she calls him. He's a spastic Wild Child let loose in the modern world, and it's a sight to see the two of them in a supermarket, with Pinocchio bouncing about the aisles, stuffing food into his mouth as she continually whacks him. In between their outings, Pinocchio is prone to painful seizures, complete with jet-action nosebleeds and a nasty little habit of oozing yellow goo from every pore. So of course, these two nutty kids fall for each other, with the woman driven mad in the process, eventually chaining up poor Mr.P in her stylishly lit abode. Meanwhile, corporate dimwits are scouring the city for their

missing patient. The two leads (I wish I knew their names, so I could give 'em proper credit) certainly rip loose—pouring all their energy into the roles. Pinocchio's high point comes when he runs down the middle of a crowded city street, blood-caked, shackled and screaming. While she gets to vomit up lumpy white paste in a train station and then roll in it (of course, if you've ever hung out in New York City's Port Authority, this is nothing new). Fukui's hyper-style (admittedly ripping off *TETSUO*'s cyber-punk approach) keeps hammering at you, in tandem with the unsettling cinematography and editing (i.e. Toss the camera on its side, spin it about, and cut in some severe close-ups for no apparent reason). And if anyone out there can explain the last 10 minutes, drop me a postcard and fill me in. The entire production enjoys twisting modern-day Japan on its ear, turning the place sour and ugly and tech-overloaded. And even if it's all just surface weirdness, I couldn't take my eyes off the damned screen.

SPACE IS THE PLACE (Rhapsody Films; 1974). Recently unearthed on video after two decades of collecting dust, this is cosmic, sense-deranging indulgence on a grande scale, featuring the late, great Sun Ra and his Intergalactic Myth-Science Solar Arkestra. So smoke a shitload of weed and prepare yourself for time-hopping, planet-hopping weirdness that somehow mixes blaxploitation,

science fiction, social commentary, concert footage, and Sun strutting about in his usual golden robes and Egyptian headgear. It's disjointed, pretentious, hilarious, and one of a kind—sort of a musical version of *THE HOLY MOUNTAIN* targeted at the Brothers. A prologue is set in Chicago, circa 1943, at a Black nightclub chock full of hoods and strippers, with Sun Ra disrupting the scene with his unique keyboard interpretations. But nothing lasts too long in this surrealistic flick, and suddenly we're transported into the middle of the desert, where the suave, evil incarnate Overseer (Ray Johnson) and Sun battle it out over a Tarot deck. Meanwhile, in the present, a spaceship lands in the middle of the ghetto, with Sun Ra stepping out of the U.F.O. like some bad-assed messiah with a pharaoh fetish. Visiting a community center, Sun tries to convince the kids to follow him into his organic-decor craft, fly into space, and colonize another planet where they can be unshackled from Earth's prejudices and hang-ups. On the surface, we get great 'fros, funky '70s fashions, and anti-whitey humor (like when an unemployed NASA engineer asks Sun Ra for a job), but there's also plenty of rapping about the



"Caucasian power structure" and Black oppression, with Sun's music bringing together his race. There's also a welcome anti-government sentiment when the authorities wiretap Ra's office and kidnap the guy on the night of his big concert. The (white) gov't scumbags want to learn his secret of "transmolecularization" and how he changes "harmonic progressions" into energy, so they torture Sun with a muzak version of "Dixie". Though hard to believe, it's even stranger than it sounds, with a fitting, apocalyptic finale. Director John Coney and scripter Joshua Smith's flick is a hodgepodge of heavyhanded philosophy, special effects, social injustice, and Ra's Afro-mystical musical message. Though often amateurish, it's also a totally whacked experience and a fitting tribute to the mighty Sun Ra.

THE BEAST [La Bete] (1975). With the possible exception of *IMMORAL TALES* [SC#4], this is director Walerian Borowczyk's most infamous work. If his name doesn't ring a bell, that's because all of his perverse arthouse antics are only available through bootleg sources—but back in the '70s Borowczyk's name was synonymous with half-baked, pretentious eroticism. Don't expect in-your-face excess though, because (despite the wicked concepts) his work is often numbingly low-key, with a sumptuous veneer hiding the fact it's just another fuckflick for highbrows. Just imagine if Peter Greenaway made softcore porn flicks...Originally conceived as an additional episode of *IMMORAL TALES*, Walerian liked his idea so much that he padded it to feature length—and it shows. Set in modern day France, Borowczyk kicks right off with two horses having sex (in loving close-up...a sight I could've lived without), and we soon meet Lucy, a young woman who's arranged to wed a gross, dour horse trainer named Mathurin (Pierre Benedetti). While the eccentric family awaits the arrival of the cardinal and the feral Mathurin is combed and shaved for the big event, the innocent Lucy (pretty blonde Lizbeth Hummel—easily the most alluring aspect of the pic) digs around the spacious estate. After hearing tales about a horny Beast hiding in the nearby woods and finding a cache of dirty pictures, Lucy lets her hair down and begin masturbating to her new-found fantasies. We finally encounter The Beast in a Victorian dream/flashback, in which a young lass is lost in the woods and encounters a guy in a matted, wolf costume, complete with raging hard on. As the damsel is chased by the Beast, her clothes are ripped off, piece by piece, with all the subtlety of a Benny Hill rerun, and when this creature finally comes, it oozes a quart of Beast Jism. The Beast eventually dies from Pleasure Overdose, when she goes down on its immense, hairy schlong. The point of it all? Lucy is sexually awakened, Mathurin is psychically connected to her Beast, and the viewer has to wade through a lot of muck to get to a couple of silly, overwrought moments of cheaply-costumed perversity. To keep his viewers from falling asleep, Borowczyk tosses in gratuitous encounters between a black butler and his employer's dreadlocked daughter (her hairstyle pre-dating Bo Derek's hideous "10" tresses by several years). They hump every moment they can get, and when he's pulled from her in mid-coitus, she has to get off by wrapping herself around a bedpost. Though this pic has obvious aspirations of greatness, under its

heavyhanded surface, it's your typical pretty-but-vapid Euro-sexcapades. Pigeonholed as an erotic fairy tale, its most sexual moments are laughable, its human drama is sleep-inducing, and it's certainly more fun to read about than actually sit through.

OH! MORO: Kansai New Art Video Magazine Vol.5: NOISE COLLECTION (1992). Looking for something loud and extreme to annoy the neighbors with? Check out this wild sampler of Japanese Industrial Noise bands, which combines experimental music, performance art and feedback into an ambient cacophony of raw sound. This is an unaposturized, hardcore barrage that'll set most folk's teeth grinding—I first watched this video bright and early on a Sunday morning, and (along with the six cups of coffee I downed) was left with a headache all day long. Most of the bands are captured in live performance, featuring snippets of their works as well as interviews (in Japanese, with no subtitles, which only adds to the confusion level). We're introduced to Incapacitants, Aube, Solmania, Mondebruits, and Bustmonsters; while Merzbow gives an outdoor 'concert' to a couple dozen confused neighbors (most of 'em holding their hands over their ears) as the band rattles sheet metal and bangs on washtubs. My fave is C.C.C.C., who have great stage presence (though I was primarily intrigued by the naked woman in the foreground, dripping candle wax all over herself), while the Most Pathetic Award goes to Masonna, who simply rolls around on the stage,

screaming. Jujin is the only participant with real lyrics, coming off more Power Punk than Noise, and they're without question the most entertaining of the lot...At its best, the music pummels its way through your brain like a blast of primal angst. At its worst, it seems like a giant goof, with a preoccupation for technology over musical talent. Either way, these musicians are committed to their cause (even if their audience isn't, as their near-empty shows indicate) and their enthusiasm is understandable, if not contagious. These are kids bored with the rancid state of modern music, and this video is a cool, hour-long trip into their way-beyond-alternative scene.

MISTRESS OF THE APES (1981).

Texas-bred auteur Larry Buchanan has subjected moviegoers to some of the most stunningly inept debacles in celluloid history. Whether it's early sci-fi anti-epics like *MARS NEEDS WOMEN* and *ZONTAR, THE THING FROM VENUS*, or his later tell-all exposes like *GOODBYE, NORMA JEAN, HUGHES AND HARLOW: ANGELS IN HELL* or *DOWN ON US*—Buchanan had the incredible knack of shoveling all this manure with a straight face and a Wal-Mart budget. THIS is one of his lamest endeavors, and that's saying a LOT! But would you expect any

less from a film that was trying to cash in on Bo Derek's tumor-inducing *TARZAN* flick from that same year? It opens in the modern day "jungle" of New York City (doesn't waste any time with its heavy-handed message, does it?), with a pretty blonde named Susan (Jenny Neumann) leading an expedition into the depths of the Congo to find her missing hubbie. Once there, she runs into a tribe of half-man/half-ape creatures dubbed "Homo Habilis" (actually four guys in loincloths, with low-browed latex pasted to their foreheads), but



compared to the rest of her male companions (the usual pack of smelly, fat, rotgut-swilling lechers) these missing links are practically Chippendale material. Things get tense when one of the Great White Hunters kills the only female in the "Near Men" tribe, but Susan decides to hang out with the knuckle-dragging natives and infiltrate their culture (i.e. squatting on a rock, grunting and scratching). These Ape Men have the hots for this curvaceous new addition, and it all leads to one brief, unexplicit sex scene that'll leave you yawning. Oh yeah, just to tie up any loose ends, Susan and her hairy new beaus eventually stop the guys responsible for her husband's disappearance—but long before that point you'll be happily asleep. The video box has Jenny N. modelling a skimpy fur bikini which she never wears, and if you're looking for truly lurid Ape-xploitation, try TANYA'S ISLAND with Vanity baring all instead. And though the credits boast that it was filmed in Kenya, the D.P. (Nicholas Josef Von Sternberg) makes it look more like the Appalachians than Africa. The music amounts to random bongo playing, but you gotta love that groovy theme song, "Ape Lady". The entire cast is wooden (in a Larry Buchanan film? No!!), including Stuart Lancaster (FASTER PUSSYCAT! KILL! KILL!), who had the market cornered on playing grubby old codgers. Never as hilariously wrongheaded as you'd hope, and 84 excruciating minutes long.

YOUNG PLAYTHINGS (1972). Any film that runs its cheesy opening credits over a '60s Big Parade toy (remember that thing? A quartet of toy soldiers with a bass drum, that marched along. Well, whether you do or don't, take my word that it was really cool when I was four years old) is an instant fave in my book, but this pic also turns out to be a fascinating T&A-fest filmed in Sweden by one of the grande masters in the genre, Joe Sarno. Throughout the '60s and '70s, Sarno filled grindhouses with the likes of MOON-LIGHTING WIVES, ALL THE SINS OF SODOM, INGA, and dozens more. Well, PLAYTHINGS is surely one of his most intriguing projects. Based on a Swedish legend and lensed in only 10 days, this flick must've confounded the usual Trenchcoat and K-Y Deuce crowd. Because even though there's wall-to-wall female flesh, it's also loaded with artsy pretensions and a decidedly feminine outlook. The flick is still rather revolutionary today—imagine if Ingmar Bergman had directed a Doris Wishman project. Set amongst the hipsters of that time, our initial threesome consists of studly Jana, his full-time squeeze Gunilla, and her close friend Nora. Though Jana and Nora are interested in a menage a trois, Gunilla is a repressed sort, but Nora has a plan to open her eyes to a few new positions. Enter Britt, a pretty blonde toymaker who convinces Gunilla into joining her troupe of followers who regularly meet at Britt's home to engage in sexually liberating scenarios. It's all very theatrical, with the actors applying white clown make-up, dressing in costume (almost always topless), and indulging in various fantasies rooted in historical fables and myths. Though extremely low-key, the film has a perverse allure. And though never explicitly hardcore, it's often exceptionally erotic. For example, we're given two princesses who must share a rocking

horse built for two—and though it has no head, it *does* have two phalluses in place of saddles. There are also many female twosomes and threesomes, always in stark white-face, with the women playing both female and male roles in their little escapades. The brazenly seductive Britt, of course, enjoys being the sexual manipulator, whether it's as Pan or Puck or a simple sorceress, always proving that sexual pleasure leads to harmony. The games get even more confusing when we learn that Julia, Britt's insane sister has escaped from an asylum—then again, is there really a Julia, or is Britt the crazy one? Obviously this pic was far too strange for the typical U.S. meat-beating contingent who were more interested in simple muff-diving than Sarno's more abstract route. It's their loss. Starring Christina Lindberg (THEY CALL HER ONE EYE), Eva Portnoff and Margareta Hellstrom, this is a seminal exploitation film—though certainly not for all tastes, it's thought-provoking, steeped in characterization, and filled with compellingly surreal eroticism.

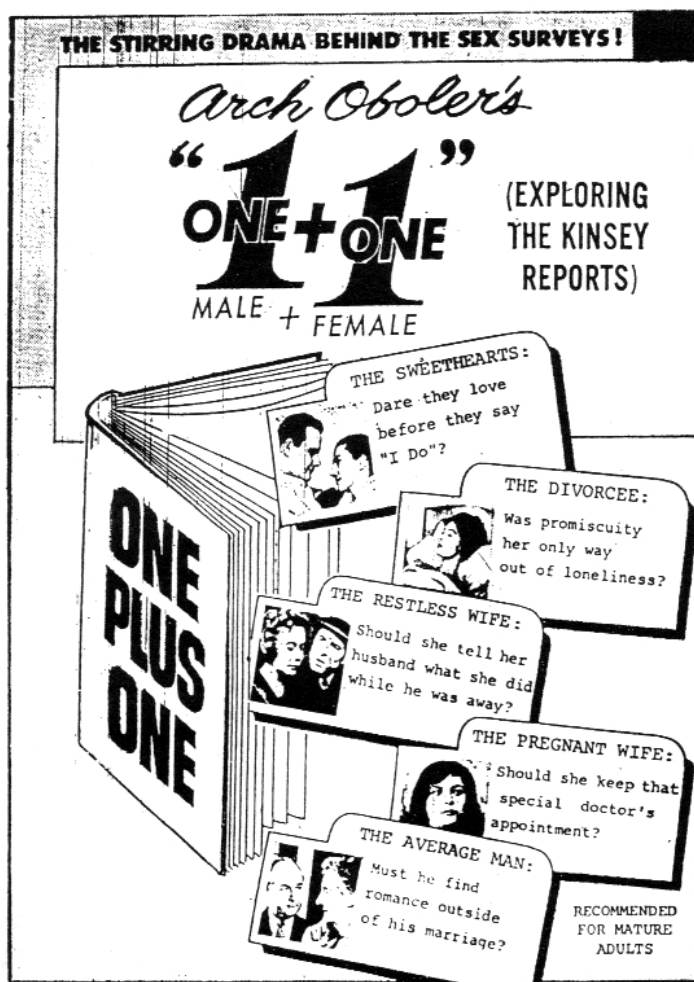
DIXIE RAY: HOLLYWOOD STAR (1983). When it comes to big, ugly skeletons in the closet, this is certainly one of the most pathetic. Poor Cameron Mitchell. It's bad enough that the lug was stuck in pix like WITHOUT WARNING and FRANKENSTEIN ISLAND, but you really need to be scrapin' bottom to take a supporting role in a hardcore porno film. Of course, this was back in the early '80s, when X-capades like this were shot on film stock, had a semblance of a plot, and could buy ad space in the N.Y. Times. Not like today's shot-in-two-days beaver-hunts, which have no illusions about their own identity. Directed by Anthony Spinelli, this hardcore homage to private eye pics is set in 1943, with John Leslie starring as Nick Popadopolis, the type of detective who'll gladly let a dame suck him off before he shoots her down in cold blood. The guy's hired by tinseltown slut Dixie Ray (Lisa de Leeuw) to track down blackmail nudie pics of the starlet—but so much for the plot, because despite all its nostalgic trappings, it's still just 10 minutes of talking and 90 minutes of humping. Nick (of course) screws every floozy in sight (all the '80s jism-queens—Veronica Hart, Kelly Nichols, Samantha Fox) with a little CHINATOWN-esque incest subplot tossed in amongst the blowjobs, lesbo action and doggie-style duets. As for Cameron, he pops up along the way playing a puffy-eyed, beer-bloated police lieutenant (complete with fedora, trenchcoat, and a handy bottle of whiskey he keeps suckin' on) who's interrogating Leslie. His handful of scenes could've been lensed in twenty minutes, and since none of 'em involve any sex, you have to wonder if Mitchell was even aware (thru his obvious alcohol haze) that his scenes were gonna be used in a porno pic. Hey, at least the rest of the cast takes it all seriously, with the filmmakers

dolling up the actresses in World War II-era hairdos, and dressing the sets to look like the '40s—nowadays they'd simply rent a room at the Holiday Inn and hang a 50-year-old old calendar on the wall. They even hired costumed extras for crowd scenes! But essentially it's the same old crapola—a good-looking chunk of cinemasturbation where acting talent is based on whether the women swallow or not.



GROUP MARRIAGE (1973). From the first, wince-inducing chords of the twangy theme song, "Darling Companion", sung by pop ear-sore John Sebastian, you know this then-trendy sex romp is gonna be a piece of shit. True enough. But it also has a couple good reasons to check it out. The film features (fourth billed) one of the earliest celluloid appearances of ex-Playmate, drive-in goddess Claudia Jennings (UNHOLY ROLLERS, GATOR BAIT, TRUCK STOP WOMEN), one of the preeminent figures of '70s grindhouse fare. Also of note is the fact this sexploitation slop was directed by Stephanie Rothman, one of the few women working behind the camera at that time. With *THE VELVET VAMPIRE*, *THE STUDENT NURSES*, *THE WORKING GIRLS*, and *TERMINAL ISLAND* also under her belt, her work might've been low-budget, but it was (usually) layered with wit and a refreshing lack of misogyny. But onto this trash, which looks like a padded episode of *LOVE AMERICAN STYLE* aimed at the T&A drive-in trade. Following in the wake of *BOB & CAROL & TED & ALICE*, it features two groovy, free-thinking, couples who swap mates. The quartet starts living together in a "group marriage", complete with a pair of petulant queen neighbors along for (supposedly) comic relief. Along the way, they pick up extra strays, including lovely Claudia as a sexy lawyer who only gets one hazy nude scene through a sheer curtain. Rothman never lets any of the fun get too gratuitous, which in this limp case is a mistake, because at its core the flick doesn't know what it wants to be. At times it's a Free Love forum pocked with messages on the "failure to communicate". Other times it's your standard, leering sex farce. Then odd, unnecessary subplots intrude, like one guy's melodramatic job as a probation officer. And though the filmmakers obviously thought they were on the cutting edge, with all four leads in bed together, smoking grass, they never shed the old morality horseshit. Under its mod surface, it's simple, romantic pabulum, swaddled in the latest trendiness. Ignoring all the comic possibilities in favor of generic, self-serious fodder. Third-rate tripe featuring some pretty faces, a little flesh, and a High Concept that was dated before it was even released. Starring Victoria Vetri (*INVASION OF THE BEE GIRLS*) and Aimee Eccles, with Jayne Kennedy in a small role.

TRACES OF DEATH (1993). Aimed at the lucrative, undemanding "reality death enthusiast" market, this rancid little item lashes together ultra-gross footage with no rhyme or reason. And judging it in comparison to over-hyped mondo pics like *FACES OF DEATH*—on that neanderthal level, this is a raging success. Truly deviant film freaks will eat this garbage up. So if you're the type of person who can't make it through the day without watching the skin peeled from a corpse's head, the skull sliced open with a surgical circular saw, and the brain lovingly scraped out in close-up, *THIS* is for YOU! It begins with the usual assortment of crime scene photos, autopsies, shotgun victims, car bombs, Bud Dwyer footage (from several tasteful angles), and quickly takes the viewer into the wonderful world of ghastly demises—including highway fatalities, rodeo injuries, and one particularly stupid tourist who's torn apart by lions in Africa when he gets out of his car in order to get a better photo of 'em. This features the type of viscera that *Hard Copy* wishes they could get away with showing, and in particular I liked the graphic pics of pet owners who died in their homes, only to have their hungry dogs or cats chow down on the corpse. In order to pad it out to near-feature length, the producers stray from their Death Motif and include surgical footage to up the Gross-Out Factor. A sex change operation (complete with bloody penis removal) goes on for over five minutes, and as far as I'm concerned the most difficult moments to take were the 13 minutes of infant cranial surgery, up close and personal. The only major gripe I have is with the insufferable, mock-sinister narration, which keeps the proceedings firmly grounded at an 80 I.Q. level...Though not exactly my choice for dinnertime entertainment, if you're looking for hardcore shock value, this is your ticket, you sick fucks.



1+1: EXPLORING THE KINSEY REPORTS (1961). Arch Oboler, radio producer and director of half-baked fare like *THE TWONKY* and *FIVE*, always had a social statement lurking under his B-movie veneer. This b&w drama is one of his most blatant efforts, taking as its topic the then-controversial Kinsey Report, which pulled the covers off of '60s sexual mores and shocked a nation of prudes. And though this flick might've been racy when first released, it's as bland and insubstantial as *Wonder Bread* nowadays. I was hoping for kitschy soap opera, but instead, it's painfully saccharine...The story begins at a university forum, with scholarly Leo G. Carroll (*TARANTULA*, *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.*) lecturing on sex in modern society. And while Leo rambles on stage, spouting facts and statistics, the audience reflects on their own problems, with Oboler weaving together five of their mini-dramas. In "The Honeymoon", a newly-married bride regrets her pre-marital sex, because when their wedding night arrives, hubbie prefers to vegetate in front of the TV. For "Homecoming", a wife has a fling while her husband is on one of his many business trips, and she has to find the guts to confess. "The Divorcee" features a cheap floozy who tries to snag a rich beau by leaping into bed with him, only to get dumped once again. In "The Baby", a wife agonizes over whether to have an abortion (then-illegal, of course), because hubbie doesn't like kids. The last one, "The Average Man", is the only episode with any hint of humor. In it, a 50-ish husband reads The Kinsey Report and decides to have an affair after decades of marital fidelity—calling up an old high school sweetie and making a date, only to discover she's now a doddering grandmother. This is leaden stuff, complete with happy and/or moralistic endings. The only mildly-grim section involves a visit to a sleazy abortionist, but even that turns out okay. Worse still, Oboler seems convinced he was making a hard-hitting important document

out of this sow's ear. In retrospect, he simply jumped on the sexual bandwagon for a few quick bucks. Lensed around snow-encrusted Toronto and populated by local unknowns, this movie has all the appeal of an extended educational featurette.

MOSQUITO [a.k.a. BLOODLUST] (1976). You have to laugh when a horror film promises to be "true in every gruesome and horrible detail." But this Swiss-made shocker follows through with those high expectations. Skillfully directed by Marijan Vajda, and featuring a four-star performance by Werner Pochath, this pic knocks you over the head from the very beginning—pulling the viewer into the grim world of madness due to child abuse. Pochath plays a deaf 'n' dumb young man who is still dealing with his brutal upbringing, complete with flashbacks to being beaten by his father (with a big fucking wooden chair!), then witnessing his younger sister's groping at Papa's hands. The poor guy is grown up now, but definitely the worse for wear in the brainpan department. He's ridiculed by his fellow office employees, frequents terminally-chubby street whores (but doesn't know what to do once they're alone), and collects dollies which he fondles perhaps a bit *too* much. This would all fall apart if Pochath didn't cut such a sad figure—a child in a man's body, out of touch with the real world, and still rattled by the deep-seated pain from his past. You really sympathize with the poor guy, so when he begins breaking into funeral parlors in order to satisfy his sudden lust for blood, this psychological foundation keeps you rooting for him (against your better judgement). He sucks the blood out of corpses, pulls out their eyeballs, cuts off their heads, graffiti's the word MOSQUITO on the walls, and when his nightly plasma parties are discovered, he (of course) has to slaughter any witnesses. The local cops label him a "20th Century Vampire", but the guy's just REALLY screwed up! Most of the time he's a quiet, gentle type who always keeps to himself (how often have you heard serial killers described that way by their next door neighbors?), not to mention being smitten to the slightly-mad young woman next door. Sure, the psycho-babble is puddle-deep, but it's more than you'll find in most modern-day horror flicks, and the entire tale is soaked in sadness. A dour, sick portrait of madness that spends the first half breathing life into the central characters, and the second half twisting him into an emotionless fiend. There's something primal in his insanity though—it's so damned pure and focused—that it places the film in a league with *DERANGED*, with the perversity escalating until it becomes Fellini crossed with Jorg Buttereit. A jarring journey into insanity—funereal in tone, disturbing in impact, and all too believable. Seek this one out, get really depressed, and enjoy!

SHATTER DEAD (1993). Writer/director Scooter McCrae's unique twist on the Living Dead genre pulls the viewer into its web from the opening sequence, making the most of a limited budget and a world of ingenuity and imagination. Filmed in Upstate New York, it reworks the hoary old clichés with an eye toward more than just cheap thrills. The flick's set in a time when the dead have come back to life, but unlike Romero's flesh eaters, these slacker zombies mostly hang out on street corners, begging for spare change—and some of the less dingy ones

could even pass for the Living. Stark Raven stars as Susan, a young woman whose gaunt, waif-like appearance belies the fact she's armed to the teeth, since the undead can often be inhospitable to warm blooded folks. Susan is stranded in the middle of the country when her car is hijacked by a religious zealot (Robert Wells), and eventually makes her way to a boarding house full of offbeat characters. But just when you think the film has settled down, up pops a Howard Stern-clone and his hoard of zombie killers. Ms. Raven is particularly effective in the lead, with her sad, cold eyes and evocative face whispering pages from her character's past. Plus it's always refreshing to have a strong female running the show, not to mention one who's smart enough to wear her handgun everywhere—even in the shower. What really stands out about this movie is its clever edge, and though it has the same drawbacks as most independent productions (primarily, its stiff amateur cast), McCrae dwells on smaller, more intimate details that give the movie additional heft—such as a discussion between a living person and a dead one, debating which lifestyle is best, or the preacherman's tirade about how the human race sucks and that the "Resurrection" is God's Divine Will. But that's not to say the flick doesn't have its fair share of exploitative elements, such as the way female nudity is ingeniously worked into the story. The film benefits from its small town veneer, and though shot on video, the filmmakers effectively mute the colors to give the proceedings an earthier edge. Packed with ideas and never afraid to

take the more cynical, downbeat path, *SHATTER DEAD* is a welcome, offbeat addition to the Living Dead Legacy.

LISA AND THE DEVIL (1972). Please don't confuse this flick with the horribly mutilated U.S. version of the pic. Yank distributors, eager to cash in on *THE EXORCIST*'s mega-success, totally re-edited the movie, sprinkled in cheezy scenes with priest Robert Alda and re-named it *THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM*. That version is still enjoyable in sort of a hokey, boy-this-is-*really*-dumb way, but it's a far cry from the original version, which is one of Mario Bava's creepiest works, packed the Recommended Yearly Allowance of lumbering symbolism and mood-drenched imagery. The plot's confusing, but let's give it a try, O.K.? Elke Sommer stars as innocent Lisa, who roams into an antique shop one day and encounter Telly Savalas, who's the spitting image of a fresco of the Devil she had just glimpsed. Well, after accidentally murdering a man who mistakes Lisa for an old flame, she takes refuge in a morbid old mansion owned by a wacko family, featuring a blind mother and her horny son, Maximilian. And hey, just by coincidence, lollipop-sucking Telly is their eccentric butler, who delivers the mondo-pretentious dialogue with perfect aplomb—slyly manipulating the characters and proving to be a fine, Satanic presence. While at the lavish estate, Lisa begins rattling the family skeletons when she notices she's the spitting image of Helena, the dead lover of the family patriarch, Carlos, who—oops—

happens to be the guy she killed in Reel One. A tad confused? That's half the fun, with Bava lading on the deliriously lensed flashbacks, dreams and dark revelations. Soon Carlo's spirit is back from the dead, chasing poor Lisa, while the supporting cast begins turning up murdered. Of course, Lisa's a half-wit when you get right down to it—

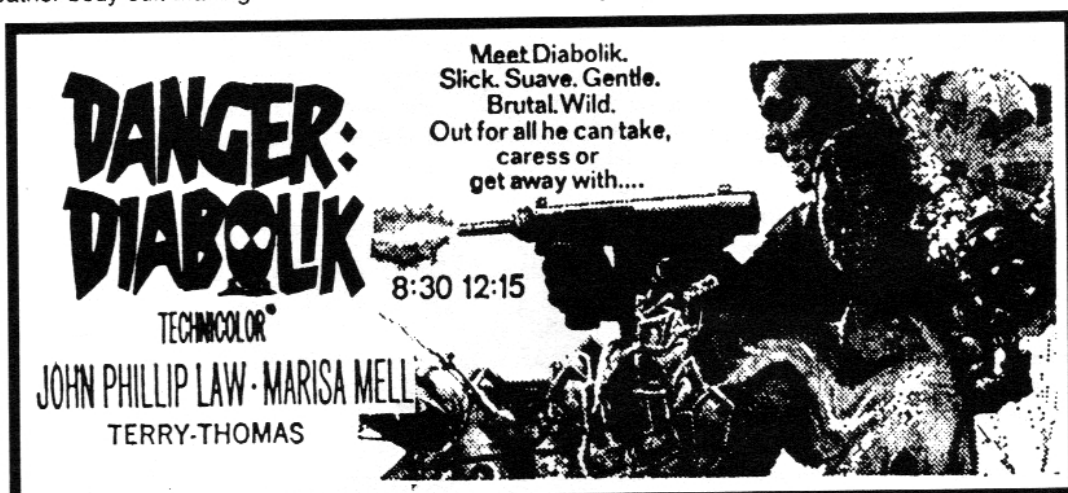


prompted by the fact she fools around with Maximillian even though he's got the long-rotted corpse of Helena laying next to them in his bed! If not altogether coherent, this pic is gloomy as hell and more concerned with mood than gore (although one lucky cast member gets repeatedly run over by a car, in a moment of Troma-like indulgence). Best of all, Bava keeps the knockout camerawork and hallucinatory passages in check, reigning them in (just barely) so that the plot and characters aren't lost in the celluloid delirium.

DANGER: DIABOLIK (1967). What a tremendous, kickass flick! A colorful, trippy comic book (by Angela and Luciana Giussani) come to life, not to mention my favorite Mario Bava movie! This has everything you could possibly ask for in a trashy, high camp caper movie—garish colors, outrageous sets, hokey dialogue, and at it's core, a suave super-criminal named Diabolik who has a fondness for fast cars, gorgeous women, stolen cash, and making the police look like idiots. And this guy's the hero, folks! John Philip Law (fresh off *BARBARELLA*) plays the lead like a larcenous James Bond, with his Euro-hunk good looks and black leather body suit making him the coolest criminal on the planet. The film kicks off with a ten million dollar heist perpetrated in broad daylight, and after that, it's off to Diabolik's secret, high-tech, underground lair, which comes complete with a selection of expensive sports cars, a swimming pool, a circular, revolving bed, and (most importantly) an alluring babe whom he makes love to while rolling in his stolen cash. Hell, in comparison it makes Adam West's Batcave look like an Avenue C tenement. But what makes Diabolik so damned groovy is that he's primarily out for kicks—like crashing a police press conference and setting off laughing gas, bankrupting the government by stealing all their treasury gold, and being a general pain in the ass to authority figures. Though Diabolik's a ladies' man (at one point he risks his life to steal a priceless necklace, just to give it his girlfriend), he isn't some prissy wimp, because during his nasty escapades cops are routinely killed and this cocky bastard doesn't give a shit. Meanwhile, the police are utterly befuddled (so what else is new?), checking out hallucinatory hippie nightclubs and even trying to recruit a Mob Boss to help track down the super-thief. There's no serious character development—but it's perfect that way—because this is gaudy, Pop Art taken to its laughable limits, and every sequence has something to gawk at. There's fabulous cinematography by Antonio Rinaldi, a supporting cast that includes Michel Piccoli, Adolfo Celi and Terry Thomas, and a bevy of beautiful women who are gonna catch their death of cold in those micro-wardrobes. This Dino de Laurentiis production (which *almost* makes up for his *KING KONG*) is a priceless relic from the late '60s, as well as an all-time favorite.

THE JIM ROSE CIRCUS SIDESHOW (1993). Direct from Lolapalooza comes what may well be the most disgusting video of the year, which comes complete with the warning that "under no circumstances should any of these acts be performed by anyone, anywhere, at any time...We're not fucking kidding." This is a modern update of the ol' freakshow routines you used to find at Coney Island, but instead of simple fire-eaters, blockheads and contortionists, Jim Rose has taken the idea to new, cringe-inducing extremes. He's the P.T. Barnum of Modern Primitive Entertainment, presenting state-of-the-art oddities with a rock 'n' roll sensibility. Filmed onstage in Seattle,

the video distills the show into 35 minutes worth of repellant, up-close highlights, with Rose proving himself the consummate ring master. But onto the attractions. First off, the pierced Mr. Lifo hangs luggage from his tongue, a concrete block from his nipples, and (for the pierce de resistance) two steam irons from his dick. Then The Torture King shoves long needles through his skin—I'm talking dozens 'n' dozens of them across his face, arms and torso—followed by The Enigma (named for his head-to-toe body tattoo of tiny jigsaw puzzle pieces), who lovingly eats earthworms and maggots. But the best is saved for last, with Matt "The Tube" Crowley shoving 7 feet of rubber tubing up his nose, then power pumping 40 ounces worth of beer through it, straight into his stomach. Better still, Matt then pumps the brackish mix of beer and stomach acid back out his nose, with Rose convincing audience idiots to actually drink the vile shit. Lemme tell you, I've seen a lot of weirdness in my years of filmgoing, but throughout this video I didn't know whether to laugh hysterically or turn away. This is performance art taken to its wildest extremes, proving, once again, that we're living in a big, wide, wonderful world. And as long as Jim Rose is around, he's gonna serve it up with a smile.



SUKEBAN DEKA [Delinquent Girl Detectives]. This entry in Japan's blossoming female superhero genre features nubile teen-aged schoolgirls who are actually undercover cops armed with deadly razored yo-yos that they toss like about throwing stars. And though they might look innocuous, these misses are jailbait Emma Peels in Angora sweaters and ankle socks. Imagine Shonen Knife with martial arts skills, and you get the idea...Fresh-scrubbed Youko Minano, Akie Kichzawa and Haruko Souraku star as the interchangeable trio, and after this fab intro, they became instant superstars in Japan, thus leading to the inevitable sequels. For their debut, the three get involved in a secret island retreat for juvenile delinquents (happily nicknamed Hell Island), where channeled teen angst turns the prisoners into robotic terrorists. Then the Mishima-like leaders will begin their coup d'etat. Saki, the head Deka, is officially retired at the ripe old age of 18, but she's pulled back into the system, along with two ex-partners, in order to crush these paramilitary fanatics and rescue the students. They take on helicopters, automatic weapons and plenty of insipid plotting with the aid of their new *super* yo-yos, plus one gal who tosses high-speed, deadly marbles! (One stoopid question: Instead of flinging yo-yos at the enemy, wouldn't a simple handgun be more efficient?) Be prepared to put all logic on hold throughout, and though the Sukeban girls are beaten, abused and even threatened with lobotomies (You mean they hadn't had them already? Difficult to tell), they prevail because they're adorable li'l minxs. It's pretty tame stuff from director Tomoo Tanaka, who unfortunately, never follows through for schoolgirl sadism fetishists. And the middle slogs down with lame attempts at character development (This ain't no Mizoguchi film! We wanna see the Deka Dolls

kicking ass!). There's outlandish action and chaos aplenty during the finale against the indestructible Evil Commandant and his isle army, but it's all instantly forgettable silliness—stealing mercilessly from pics like *LA FEMME NIKITA* and *THE TERMINATOR*, while feeling like the Japanese action equivalent of *BEVERLY HILLS 90210*. Pretty faces, empty heads, and all the consistency of Velveeta.

FEMALE NEO-NINJAS. Yes, here's even more Japanese high weirdness, featuring yet another trio of adorable crime stoppers. But unlike many Hong Kong fantasy/action pics, which have their own internal (albeit twisted) logic, the Japanese have the market cornered on rapid-fire foolishness that gleefully ignores all common sense. This one beats the *SUKEBAN* series hands down. It's unapologetically asinine, entertaining as hell, and stars three pretty Ninja sisters—Ayame, Kikyo and Momiji—who dress up in black leather miniskirts and protect the city against evildoers. They begin by saving a truckload of half-naked women kidnapped by a Chinese slave ring, but like any profession in the '90s, work is scarce. So by day these gals are forced to roam the streets, handing out publicity flyers and dreaming of having a regular job someday (like secretarial work). The three get their ninja skills put to the test with the appearance of villains who are destroying priceless Japanese artifacts, a time-travelling ninja from the past, and a mysterious scroll involving UFO's and the power to rule the planet. It's all as ridiculous as it sounds, and despite some brief moments of mayhem, it's aimed strictly at a Saturday Morning TV mentality. But halfway into the flick the *real* fun begins, when one of the girls is taken captive, strung up in only her panties, and whipped across the tits as a snake slithers between her spread legs. Suddenly, this ain't Josie and the Pussycats anymore, and from then on, all bets are off! Even though most of the pic is pure adolescent fare, from outta nowhere we'll get naked Sumo wrestling and other violent (all too brief) tidbits that give it the flavor of an Asian Afterschool Special made by Quentin Tarantino. Director Tomoyuki Kasai keeps it short (under 90 minutes) and frantic, but I would've preferred a nastier edge to the *entire* package. Though the leads are damned cute, they're basically just Japanese equivalents of Valley Girls, and as Ninjas go, they're pretty helpless—they're libel to faint at the sight of a broken fingernail. You'll be shaking your head in disbelief from start to finish (I particularly enjoyed the finale at Mt. Fuji, with our heroines *bicycling* to the rescue), and this fast-paced nonsense is the perfect prescription for that killer hangover you end up nursing one afternoon.

FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE [a.k.a. STAYING ALIVE] (1977). This is a prime example of what made '70s grindhouse fare so much damned fun. A flick so cheap, nasty, and outrageously un-P.C. that it's an instant fave! It kicks off in high gear when a trio of killers (led by scumbag William Sanderson) escape from N.Y.C. police, steal a pimp's car and head upstate. What these guys lack in charm, they make for in sheer brutality and a sick-assed sense of humor—knifing a gas station attendant, sticking up a liquor store, pointing a gun at a baby, and shooting people just to watch 'em die. After all that exhausting anti-social behavior, the

felons take a pit stop and pull a *DESPERATE HOURS* by holding a black family hostage in their rural home. Director Robert A. Edelson pulls no punches from that moment on. Just imagine if The Cosby Family met The Manson Family. The white trash Sanderson immediately gets drunk and starts firing off rapid-fire racial slurs to his captives (the typical nuclear unit: Parents, a young son, a crippled grandmother, plus as a special surprise victim, a blonde young woman who gets stripped and tossed off a cliff), calling them "Uncle Remus", "Monkey-Face", "Martin Luther Coon", and even making the father tap dance. It's so mean-spirited that the flick approaches *LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT* proportions, and after only ten minutes of verbal and physical abuse, you *really* want these assholes to get the bejesus kicked out of 'em. Most of the action takes place in the wood-paneled den, with Sanderson going on redneck tirades about "niggers"—even calling his partners a "chink" and a "spick". He's truly one of the most hateful characters ever put on film. The type of pin-headed cracker who's a Big Man only as long as he has his Big Gun. Eventually, the cops track down the killers and surround the house, but when the family gets the upper hand, they take the law into their own hands for a rousing, immoral finale. Producer William Mishkin has always had a nose for sleazy entertainment (even if it means having a little boy repeatedly bludgeoned in the face with a rock), and this pic delivers! You couldn't have paid me to be the only white face in a Harlem theatre when this was first shown! But the most frightening aspect of the flick is the fact it was probably enjoyed on

both sides of the Mason-Dixon, for totally different reasons. While black audiences cheered the long-awaited revenge, in the Deep South, this was probably a hoot for in-bred racists who got off on the crude, anti-social rubbish (and were probably so whacked on Thunderbird they didn't make it to the comeuppance part). An after-film shower is optional, but recommended.

CRIME WAVE (1986). Not to be confused with Sam Raimi's lunatic comedy of the same name, this low-budget Canadian pic is almost as bizarre, with a surreal veneer and a wealth of movie addict fantasies. Writer/director John Paizs gives himself the lead as Steven Penny, a scriptwriter who can't seem to finish his screenplay for "Crime Wave". In fact, all he has is a title, various rejected beginnings and endings, and nothing in between. The story is told in flashback, narrated by a young girl (Eva Kovacs) who lives next door to Penny and has saved all his discarded manuscript pages—becoming his biggest (and only) fan in the process. Along the way the viewer is shown several of these unused, half-baked high concepts, featuring an inept Elvis impersonator, a self-help expert, and even a mild-mannered couple who go on a "Crime Wave" in hopes of cornering the Direct Mail Distribution market. Penny is sort of a nutcase (not to mention, a spectacularly wrong headed writer)—never speaking a word throughout and

resembling a cross between Mr. Rogers and Barton Fink. For much of the flick, this seems like a kids movie for very strange children, what with its adolescent viewpoint, sing-songy music, and garish, Joe Dantesque take on Middle America. But it's also pocked with darker moments, like Penny's cross country trip to meet script doctor Dr.



Jolly—who turns out to be the *real* psycho. And a fallen streetlight provides the fateful impetus for Penny's final "Color Crime Movie", which involves his own life, mega-success and death. Yes, this is an odd one, folks. The type of project David Lynch would churn out if he worked for Nickelodeon, with hyper-unreal colors and sets, a broad acting style that borders on camp, and not a trace of saccharine. I'm sure most people who saw this pic were totally perplexed. I admit I was too, but that's what made it so lovable.

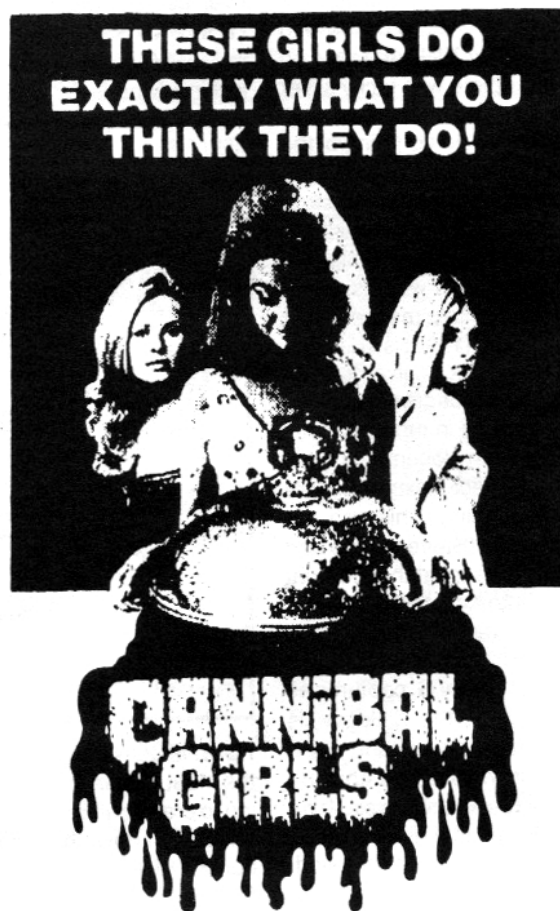
CANNIBAL GIRLS (1973). Though this pic never lives up to its no-bullshit title, it's still a fun piece of ultra-low-budget trash, as well as the first film directed by Ivan Reitman, before he became the standard-bearer for megabudget comedies like *GHOSTBUSTERS*. For this debut, Ivan recruited a pre-SCTV Eugene Levy and Andrea Martin to star as a couple vacationing in the snowy Canadian wilderness. And Levy gives the viewer their first scare with his honky-afro hairstyle and bushy moustache—looking like the illegit son of Gene Shalit. Levy plays a total jerk (misogynists will enjoy how he blithely calls Andrea a "broad"), Martin is a groovy airhead, and while stranded in the middle of nowhere, the pair are told the Legend of the Cannibal Girls—three lovely, blood-worshipping temptresses who pick up nerdy guys (who never question the girls' motives, since they haven't had sex since the '60s), take 'em to their farm, fuck 'em, and eat 'em. But all that bloodshed is in the past (so they're told), with a restaurant now on the site of the ghoulish gals' home. The unorthodox diner is run by Rev. Alexander St. John (Ronald Ulrich), and his choice of location must not be very popular, since Eugene and Andrea are his only customers. Or perhaps it's his staff, which consists of a foot-dragging hunchback and a trio of waitresses who look remarkably like the flesh-eating femmes in our flashback. I'd be requesting the check at this point, but neither Levy or Martin are very sharp, deciding to hang out and be seduced by the Rev's wine cellar, as well as his female buffet—one blonde, one redhead, one brunette. Eventually, they try to hypnotize Andrea into killing Eugene, drinking his "blood of life" and joining their commune. All of this nonsense is endearingly schlocky, and it's obvious that nobody on the set was taking it seriously. There's a little comedy, some bloodshed, brief nudity, plus a bevy of lovely young women chowing down on human flesh with their bare hands. Reitman gives the flick a playful structure, teasing the viewer with dream sequences, and it's all more ingenious than most nickel-and-dime projects from that era. Featuring able support from Randall Carpenter, Bonnie Neilson and Mira Pawluk as the Cannibal Cuties, this is short, sweet, relatively nasty swill.

...EVEN MORE INDEPENDENT WORKS. They just keep coming out of the woodwork. These filmmakers don't want to spend their lives whining about what a great movie they could've made, if only they'd been given a chance. Instead, they grab a camera, crank out their damned production, and send it out. Hell, even when these things suck, I've still gotta admire the filmmakers for actually creating something, instead of sitting on their asses (like most of the public).

Happily, I'm able to report that none of these wildly diverse, underground productions happen to suck... **THE STRANGER (1994; Ghost Limb Films, 147 2nd Avenue No.502, New York, NY 10003)** is the latest from Christopher Frieri (*THE ORBITRONS, I WAS A TEEN-AGE MUMMY*). But unlike his other cool efforts, which combined horror and kitsch, this is a 50-minute, pitch-black portrait of madness starring Mark Fucile as a chronic dirtbag with no future, no skills and no personality. His spacey, pregnant squeeze (Lora Zuckerman) is a naselly ditz, and their life is a dead end hell. When he's not at his job (barroom janitor), Fucile complains incessantly about how life has screwed him over, and takes his aggressions out by keeping a woman stripped, bound and closeted. There are potshots at religion, golf, midgets, and New Jersey life—plus color bits of hallucinatory bloodletting, small children and even a goddamned monkey. Frieri is trying for something more elusive than his earlier genre homages, but what this flick lacks in coherency, it makes up for in bizarre imagery and a nerve-frying lead. Fucile is absolutely terrific—so real and disgusting that you hate the psychotic fuckhead from the start. Plus, I can't fault any '90s film that pulls all the old L.S.D. symbolism out of

mothballs—swirling lights, graveyards, et cetera (O.K., perhaps the ballerinas in the cemetery are a bit much, but just think how much fun they must have had filming it). By the end, Fucile sings a sphincter-tightening tune in an Elvis suit, while a floozy gets gang banged in the crowd. But that's not even the nastiest part, folks. All in all, an indulgent, rancid, and very entertaining chunk of celluloid bile... **VITAL IDLE (1993; DeWitt Mills, 221-A Carroll Street, Atlanta, GA 30312)** is a trippy, 30-minute visual explosion. A non-narrative collage of sounds and sights, utilizing found footage, splices, art supplies, and gonzo enthusiasm. It's broken into four shorts, with the first, "Next Time I Fall in Love", gleefully manipulating film footage from various smarmy love songs. Bits run backwards, upside down, with scratches and hand-painted colors splattered directly onto the film stock. The second, "Vacation IV: Mexican Vacation" is essentially a silent home movie featuring a bunch of old coots on a fishing trip, beating their catch to death with a stick. "Bushjockey" takes footage from a now-kitschy corporate P.R. pic featuring carpet-making machines, and gives it a decidedly hallucinogenic edge by overlaying the soundtrack from Russ Meyer's *B.V.D.* The last tidbit, "She Makes Me

Dizzy and Confused" is a barrage of flashing colors, accompanied by white noise industrial music. All this nonsense must be mind-wrenching if you stumbled upon it in the middle of a mescaline overdose, and most of it made my head ache after about two minutes. Though genuinely twisted, it often seemed more like a goof than an actual stab at saying something even mildly coherent... **THE STORY OF MOMMY & DADDY (Mike Trippiedi, 802 Frank Drive, Champaign, IL 61821; \$20)** is a tasteless slice of comic, backyard filmmaking, featuring a wildly dysfunctional family and the affect it has on their young daughter, Meghan (Jennifer J. Gehr). When Dad's caught in bed with a circus clown, the dark secret begins to rot away the family unit, with Dad becoming a battered hubbie when Mom takes a hot flatiron to his face. This mental abuse is more than



Meghan can stand, so she rebels and joins a gang of Bulemic teenage girls whose fave pastime is stuffing their faces, shouting "Long Live Karen Carpenter!", and vomiting en masse. Meghan eventually falls for a fat behemoth named Stinky, and the best part has the street gang facing off against a rival faction of femme tap dancers. The nonsense is capped off by a ridiculous plot twist and a healthy dose of mass self-abuse. This 20-minute flick is packed with John Waters-styled middle-class satire and cheap jokes aplenty. And though the ideas are much more clever than their execution, the actors try hard and never resort to obvious winking-at-the-camera. Silly and well-intentioned, but only fitfully successful...On a purely personal level, **OPEN MIKE: A Performance by Arthur Friedel and William Teller (1993)** is one of my favorite videos of the year. Most viewers won't get it, unless they've had the pleasure to hang out at Gallagher's Ship's Mast bar in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Before they closed their doors in '93, director Sam Zanger captured for posterity one of the area's most lovable fixtures, Arthur Friedel, at his musical best. When I first saw Arthur, several years ago, hunched over a tiny table near the Mens' Room, my first impression was that he looked like Father Merrin from *THE EXORCIST* after being crushed in a trash compactor, and when he sings it's like Tom Waits crossed with a blender. Hell, I love the guy. Accompanied by William Teller on guitar, Arthur shuffles onto the tiny stage (complete with tacky silver backdrop) and croaks out such classics as "You'll Never Know", "Bicycle Built for Two" and a lyrically-impaired version of "King of the Road". The twenty minute video includes an interview with Arthur, plus b&w street footage of the guy dancing a maniacal softshoe and marching to "Over There". This is a must-see for any local resident nostalgic for the Ship's Mast (I almost got teary-eyed at the sight of the regulars grabbing hot dogs from the buffet), as well as a fine tribute to Friedel and the joy he brought to the drunken masses...But I've saved the absolute best for last! **SLICE OF LIFE (1997)** is a deviant, underground gem, secured from the illustrious Rick Sullivan's Gore Gazette Video Library. Without question, the most depressing piece of work I've seen in months, it's not even a movie in the traditional sense—there are no credits, no cuts, and it simply documents what happens on the Lower East Side one day, while director extraordinaire Buddy Giovinazzo happened to have a camera rolling. This tasty, 18 minute tidbit begins with a couple of young punks (Steven Oddo and an unidentified, Goth-gorgeous female) on a rooftop, at the moment she breaks off their relationship. As she rips into him, telling the guy that she's sick of his bullshit, the poor boob begins bawling and begging her to stay (always the stupidest thing to do, as I can attest from past experience). The always-resourceful Buddy G. captures all this turmoil with his hand-held camera (though the dialogue is sometimes obscured by ambient neighborhood noise) and it's a frightening mirror to one's own emotional sinkholes. The episode gets severely evil when Oddo grabs a razor blade and starts slashing up his arms in order to get cheap sympathy. When that doesn't work, he moves up to his shoulders and then, covered in his own blood, proceeds to vomit up a small pond. Outside of Richard Kern's work, this is one of the most disturbing underground pics I've ever witnessed. Guerilla moviemaking at its most illuminating (do the two "stars" even know this thing is floating about?), and so real you can almost smell the city beneath 'em. SEE IT!

THE MINI-SKIRT MOB (1968). This American-International cycle-rama was released at the height of the short-lived genre, but compared to drive-in epics like *THE WILD ANGELS*, this is kid's stuff. Despite its lurid title, it only rarely lives up (or rather, down) to its dirtbag potential, dishing out PG-level antics while mixing tough dames, choppers, and dumb-as-a-stump rednecks. A prime example of how quickly a schlocky studio can latch onto a good thing, and turn it into commercial pabulum...Diane McBain, sporting more hair and hairspray than a human spine could possibly hold up, plays

Shayne, the leader of an all-femme gang called The Mini-Skirts. For a motorcycle club, they're inordinately clean cut and heavily permed—having their pussy-whipped men (cycle pic vet Jeremy Slate and even-then-haggard Harry Dean Stanton) do their dirty work while the ladies touch up their make-up. These gals are totally unbelievable from the start, looking more like high school debbs than chopper chicks, and director Maury Dexter (*MARYJANE*) continues to wash this entry free of excessive grit and grime. The slim plot gets rolling when Shayne and her Dolly Parton hairdo get jealous of an ex-beau rodeo star (hunky but hollowheaded Ross Hagen) who dumped her for a 'nice' girl. Now Shayne's out for revenge, terrorizing the hornymooning couple in their mobile home, stranding 'em in the desert, and taking pot shots at the pair. All the while, Diane tries to be a tough-as-nails bitch, but only her petulant whining is believable. In fact, the entire production is misguided and artificial. Instead of real Hell's Angels types, we get illiterate cowboys. Instead of action-packed anti-social behavior, we get clogged melodrama with all the characters sitting in the middle of nowhere, bickering. And though there are plenty of leggy ladies on display, that's the most risqué it ever gets. Featuring a theme song warbled by Patty McCormack (*THE BAD SEED* kid a decade later, not to mention McBain's co-star in *MARYJANE*). If you're in the mood for mindless, drunken, ass-kicking (who isn't?), I'd suggest you skip this pedestrian poseur.



FULL MOON HIGH (1981). Larry Cohen is without question one of the most imaginative, subversive filmmakers working today, managing to crank out mini-masterpieces with a minimum of studio interference. Run down his list of movies, and there's barely a loser in the bunch: *BLACK CAESAR*, *Q*, *GOD TOLD ME TO*, *THE PRIVATE FILES OF J. EDGAR HOOVER*, *RETURN TO SALEM'S LOT*, et cetera. And though they're all laced with social subtexts, Cohen never forgets to keep his slobbering grindhouse audiences entertained with sly humor and cheap thrills...But let's move onto one of his few misfires (*THE WICKED STEPMOTHER* is the other, although that one is such a total debacle they should've closed down the set and erased all trace of its existence). On the surface, this looks like a *TEEN WOLF* rip-off, but don't eject that video yet, because it was actually made years before that Michael J. Fox feces. Adam Arkin stars as an average high school student in the '50s, who travels to Romania with his right-wing dad (pie-eyed pitchmeister Ed McMahon), only to be bitten by a werewolf (more like a stunt man in a natty Teddy Bear suit) and return to his high school football team as a lycanthropic lineman. Arkin spends his hairy nights biting girls on the asses (the local newspaper's headline: "Werewolf Annoys Community"), while

his dad attributes his son's "five o'clock shadow" to Commie flouride in the water. In an odd turn, Arkin decides to leave town and spend the next 20 years roaming the globe and staying eternally young—only to return to his modern-day alma mater. Pretending to be his own son, he confronts old teachers, friends and lovers, and tries to win the big football game. Sounds strange? It is. Too bad the pic's lousy. And if it wasn't for Cohen's name on the credits, I would've turned it off halfway through. Larry was obviously trying to make larger statements about the darker edges of America, then and now (instead of expected '50s nostalgia, we get chipped beef and gingoistic patriotism—and his present-day school is a haven for dopers, thugs and disco-heads), but it's also shockingly shoddy, with humor that makes the *POLICE ACADEMY* series look like Oscar Wilde. At least the supporting cast is amusing, with Joanne Nail (*SWITCHBLADE SISTERS*) as a dominatrix-type, and TV whores Desmond Wilson, Louis Nye and Roz Kelly filling time. Plus, for one brief instant, when *Alan Arkin* pops up for a cameo as a psychologist, you think to yourself "Thank god! It's a real actor!" A numbingly cheesy yawn-fest.

RIKKI O [a.k.a. STORY OF RICKY] (1991). Is this just another Hong Kong action import? No way! This pic brings comic book ultra-violence to vibrant life, with a style that harkens back to the cheesy superheroics of Toho flicks, delivering non-stop action, one-dimensional characters, and more on-screen bloodshed and inventive gore than you can imagine (and in my case, that's *PLENTY!*). Directed by Lan Nai Kai (*EROTIC GHOST STORY*), this takes an age-old sci-fi cliché and runs with it, with a sadistic, futuristic prison the setting for our tale. In the year 2001, businesses have taken over the penal system (a la *FOR-TRESS*, *NO ESCAPE*, et cetera), with cell blocks controlled by a vicious quartet of inmates named the Gang of Four who're in cahoots with the dishonest, hook-handed assistant warden. But there's a new sheriff, er, prisoner in town and his name's Rikki (Fan Siu Wang)—a tough street punk who brings justice to the incarcerated. So far it seems like any other genre pic, but when Rikki gets attacked in the shower, he shows off his martial arts finesse by punching his fist *CLEAN THROUGH* an opponent's stomach! Yow! From that moment on, we're in completely fucked up territory, and in flashbacks we observe how Rikki was taught by his mentor/uncle the secrets of "Breath Control" (an accumulation of energy that can be used to turn one's enemies into Hamburger Helper). The plot ladles on the usual parade of fights and rivalries, but it's punctuated by graphic crucifixions, eyes popped out, razor blades stuffed in mouths, arms hacked off, plus plenty of unnecessary comic relief (like the warden's seemingly-retarded, lard-assed son). And it's not every day you see a guy strangling someone else with his own disemboweled intestines! It's all so matter-of-factly sadistic that you'll be howling. I can tell you that I was sittin' there totally stunned, surrounded by empties. None of the violence is very unsettling (unlike *MEN BEHIND THE SUN*). It's just gross and ridiculous, with a Saturday matinee serial pacing as Rikki knocks off the Gang, one by one (every ten minutes, another crisis, another corpse). The film's clean, stark design lends to its comic book aesthetic, but the direction is surprisingly flat during

the rare moments of non-violence. So what you get is jailhouse clichés ad infinitum, shock brutality, even a rubbery monster at the very end—and though rarely breaking the triple-digit I.Q. level, this pic is a total blast for hardcore sleazemavens.

THE SWEET RIDE (1968). Every decade brings with it a small, unique cinema sub-genre that embraces some quickly-faded trend. In the '80s it was the breakdance flick, in the late '70s we got glitter disco (can anyone forget the 20-pounds-overweight Linda Blair, squeezed into a body stocking for *ROLLER BOOGIE?* I wish I could), and in the '60s there was the surfer/beach movie. But unlike Frankie and Annette's innocuous hijinx, this pic actually tries to be a serious, beach blanket *PEYTON PLACE* about misspent youth. *Big mistake* ... First off, the cast is particularly frightening, with Tony Franciosa as a tennis hustler named Collie and Michael Sarrazin as surf bum Denny. And while over-the-hill Tony tries too hard to seem groovy, Sarrazin is just a sack of solemn mannerisms. Thank goodness for post-GILLIGAN'S ISLAND Bob Denver, who steals every scene as beatnik jazz pianist pal, Choo Choo. All three wastoids share a beach house, and one day a young starlet named Vicki enlists their aid when her swimsuit is knocked off by a wave. Since topless Vicki is played by Jacqueline Bisset, they all lend a horny hand. So much for the

intro—now the viewer has to slog through all their fatuous emotional baggage and whiny schtupping between Sarrazin and Jackie. You quickly realize that though the movie was aimed at the youth market, it was made by The Establishment, and it reeks of their moralistic mindset. It's pathetically low on sleaze, plus, at nearly two hours, someone desperately needed to take a pair of hedge clippers to its mid-section. Thankfully, director Harvey Hart (who made cool pics like *DARK INTRUDER* and *SHOOT*, before losing all dignity with *THE PARTY ANIMAL* and *BEVERLY HILLS MADAM*) squeezes in a few cool scenes. Choo Choo gets drafted and pretends to be gay (complete with a pink dog). A couple bikers show up, led by a bald Charles Dierkop as Mr. Clean. Trip band extraordinaire Moby Grape makes a quick, yet psychedelic club appearance. And a cranky old neighbor continually refers to the cast as "degenerate communists" and threatens to

shoot 'em all (unfortunately, he never does). Mostly all we get is sledgehammer soap opera—just what you want in a rebellious youth flick—made palatable only by the visual allure of Ms. Bisset at her hottest. Give me *PSYCH-OUT* any day over this bloated drivel.

BEVERLY HILLS GIRLS (1985). I'm reviewing this deadening piece of shit for the record. After reading blurbs about this thing in assorted bootleg catalogs, I decided to check out this softcore slop for myself. The fact this X-rated quickie featured legendary scream queens (god, I'm sick of that term) Michelle Bauer and Linnea Quigley (under the pseudonym Linnea LaStray), made it sound like prime fodder to me! But don't get your gizzard greased too soon, bishop-whackers, cuz this shot-on-video pic is as limp and dead as Steve Guttenberg's career. Despite copious nudity, it's tame and low grade. Typical no-budget fondling and gratuitous flesh peddling. A grainy, badly-lit, two-day, soft-X (sorry, no deep-dish penetration, you perverts) wonder.

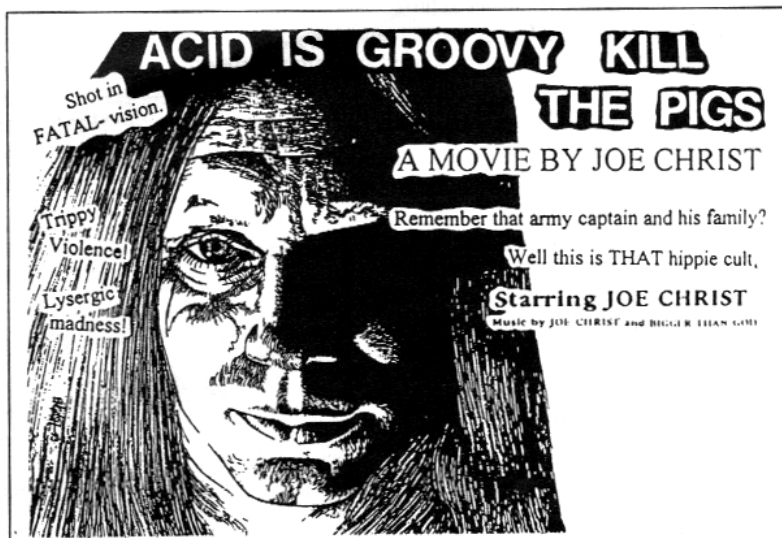


Bauer stars as a lesbian video producer who likes to strip and masturbate in the editing room. Meanwhile, Linnea pops up in different scenes as a member of an all-femme rock band that models lingerie on stage. Scrawny-looking Quigley stumbles over her lines; sings a ditty entitled "Strange Ways" (write that yourself, Linnea?) as half-nekkid rock video babes wriggle on top of cars; and has only one inept sex scene with another gal that mostly consists of tedious breast groping. In addition to Linnea's and Michelle's sorry sequences, there's the usual filler for the brown-paper-bagged-video crowd, including a soapy bath with some nameless, desperate starlet and lots of *Where the Boy's Aren't* action. It ends with the entire cast participating in a big executive orgy to promote the band's new video. So much for the scintillating plot... The performers stumble about like they're on *I've-Got-Rent-To-Pay Auto-Pilot*, director (the term's debatable) Mike Hall tosses in cheezy video effects, and the raunchiest it ever gets is some thru-the-panties caressing. Only Bauer seems to put any energy into the gig, especially when it comes to the gratuitous girl-on-girl action, but I'm sure nobody has been putting this on their resume. It's a total embarrassment, and that's saying a LOT for these folks.

VIOLENT SHIT II: MOTHER HOLD MY HAND (1992). Director Andreas Schnaas is up to his old tricks again with this German-made sleaze-romp. And even though this sequel is amateurish, hokey and incomprehensible, it's still miles better than the first and loaded to the rafters with an endless torrent of ridiculously fake gore. And if you've got a sick sense of humor, this is an inept laugh riot, with its gushing wounds reminiscent of *MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL*. Once again, Karl the Butcher (a fat, semi-retarded Leatherface-clone) is on a rampage across the rural countryside with his Jason Voorhees-style mask and machete. But this time around, he's *really* pissed off. And with his scaly ol' mother cheering him on, Karl kidnaps campers and makes meals outta their remains. There's the usual torture, mayhem, decaps, taking the edge of a shovel to a girl's face—but all that's kid's stuff compared to when Karl plunges a big ol' fishhook through a guy's testicle and it bursts like a blood-engorged pimple. And it gets downright rude when he staples a girl's vagina shut. Then, after a long day of dismembering strangers, Mom keeps Karl amused by reading him pornographic bedtime stories. Sweet. At the end, Karl widens his killing spree, thus allowing all of the director's friends to get bit parts as blood-spattered victims. Despite the gore, this is tedious stuff, mixing clichés with 2nd-rate viscera. Karl and Mom are just cheap knock-offs from better horror pics, and we never get to know any of the campers, because they're all dead and disemboweled within minutes. Then again, any vidiot who picks up this movie and goes "Violent Shit? Cool!", will probably get a few kicks out of it after a couple six packs. It even ends with a barrage of 'wacky' out-takes, proving Schnaas will even rip-off the sorry likes of Hal Needham.

ACID IS GROOVY, KILL THE PIGS (1993; Joe Christ, 151 First Ave. #77, New York, NY 10003). Underground auteur Joe Christ's previous outing, *SPEED FREAKS WITH GUNS* [SC#5] was a fave, full of cheap humor and anti-social behavior. And his latest half-hour hellride is no exception—a cross country extravaganza from New York City's most prolific (not to mention utterly twisted) indie filmmaker. A guy who's not afraid to fill his movies with good ol' subversive elements like drugs, crime, vomit, sex, and psychosis. The fun begins when strung-out Christ scores a sheet of blotter acid (in exchange for 200 bucks and a blowjob), stuffs the entire wad into his mouth, after which his television set sends him messages to kill, kill, KILL!! As he reminisces about past crime sprees and various accomplices, Christ grabs a handy gun, and off he goes, still crazy after all these years. Halfway through this loosely-basted crime-a-

rama you realize this flick is nothing but an excuse to terrorize and slaughter a bunch of shitstain characters. But damn, is it fucking entertaining! You get a couple chicks high on L.S.D., killing a naked broad in her home. Burn-outs rambling nostalgically about "snuffing" their first victim. Hallucinations from one too many years of bad acid and a braincell count you could keep track of on two hands. Best of all, Christ murders a guy by leaving a banana peel on the stairs, then moves up in the world by becoming a Door-to-Door Maniac, complete with loads of fake blood (at least I hope it was fake). As usual, Joe is his own best actor—bringing a genuine sense of drug-addled insanity and exhilaration to the part. The cruel and deranged humor he brings to a simple bludgeoning is perfect, and whenever he's on screen, the film's on track. The rest of the cast merely seems like Goth pals he recruited for an afternoon's fun... This is off the cuff, off the wagon, lower-than-low-budget filmmaking at its most warped.



THE RITUAL OF DEATH (1990). When it comes to low-rent, no-holds-barred, schlock horror, director Fauzi Mansur might well be the Herschell Gordon Lewis of the '90s. In other words, not a whole lotta talent, but lots of enthusiasm and balls. Lacking all pretensions, he takes us back to the good ol' Drive-In Daze, when subtext was all but forgotten because the crew was too busy pouring fake blood and rubber internal organs over the supporting cast. Back in the '70s, this flick would've had cars lined up for miles... A cut-rate theatre troupe is looking for new material and decides to reenact an ancient Egyptian ritual of reviving the dead. Of course, in order to get the procedure down perfect, the peabrains steal a sacred instruction manual, and so begins the inevitable slaughter. The first half is pocked with unintentional humor at the expense of the amateur cast. Where did Mansur find these actors? Local cable access shows? College drinking buddies? They can barely read the script (we're not talking Chaucer), giving their lines all the gusto of a foreign language instruction tape. Then Fauzi tosses in goofy hallucinations to keep the laughs coming, including Indians dancing about in tribal dress (according to the screenplay, Indians also used this ritual—or more likely, Indians-R-Us was cheaper than Rent-An-Egyptian), a naked broad bathing in blood from a severed goat's head, plus a constipated old guy who oozes green slime. The action picks up when clean cut Brad (Olaire Coan) is possessed by a demon and begins craving raw meat, strangling women, and (most attractively) developing lesions on his body which squirt a pint of pus when he picks at 'em. Soon Brad's a snarling, lumpy-faced, actress-killer in a black executioner's hood. Sure, this is predictable swill, but its *raisin d'etre* is the gore quotient: Eyes popped out, a kitchen knife rammed down a throat, disemboweling with the claw end of a hammer, and don't forget the gratuitous nudity—that'll sell some more tickets! (Too bad

we never see perpetually braless lead blond Carina Palatinik naked.) Though aimed at a moron mentality, after a couple six packs, you'll be ready for this supreme trash. It even has the obligatory theme song performed by some shitty band who MUST be pals of Fauzi's.

THE THING WITH TWO HEADS and **THE INCREDIBLE 2-HEADED TRANSPLANT** (both 1972). As if one 2-headed flick wasn't enough, both of these trashy pics were released at the same time, both vying for the always-lucrative 2-headed movie market. Both of 'em suck, of course, but each has their own selective charms, mostly due to their embarrassed casts... **THING** is the larger-budgeted affair (spending thousands of dollars, instead of hundreds), with Ray Milland a prime example of an Oscar-winning actor trapped in drive-in dreck in order to pay the mortgage. And if you thought crapola like **FROGS** was an embarrassment for Ray, you haven't checked out this Late Show clinker, perpetrated by director Lee Frost (who would later find his niche with the kill-fest **THE BLACK GESTAPO**). Milland plays a sourpus multimillionaire who's the founder of the famed Transplant Foundation. When he's diagnosed with cancer, the Doc plans to transplant his entire head onto a donor's healthy body—and then have the original head chopped off. Of course, NO ONE would allow himself to get suckered into being a donor for this type of preposterous plan. That is, until retired pigskinner Rosey Grier (as a death row convict) lumbers onto the scene. A white racist's head sewn onto a black man's body? Sounds like a new Fox sitcom, if you ask me. The resulting fiasco veers wildly from the tasteless, to the silly, to the downright banal. After the anesthesia wears off, Ray and Rosey spend the second half of the flick connected at the spine, running from klutzy kops and bickering with each other (Grier grunts, "Whaddaya guys done?!" And Milland snarls "Shaddup!"). It all ends with a tedious dirtbike chase through the hills of SoCal, with Rosey looking particularly stupid with that cheap latex Ray Milland head strapped to his shoulder. Milland doesn't attempt to act, Grier can't, and though you keep wanting to laugh at this brainless concept, the filmmakers ignore every possible straight line. What a wasted opportunity! Instead, they toss in relevant (re: lame) jabs at bigotry, and the comic relief is cringeable ("Do you have two of anything else?" asks Grier's girlfriend). Even cameo appearances by William Smith and Rick Baker (as a two-headed gorilla) can't save it from being a big snore...Of the two, **INCREDIBLE** wins the Bad Taste Honors, hands down. It's so tremendously terrible, it's a cheapjack anti-classic, with director Anthony Lanza (**THE GLORY STOMPERS**) starting off on the right foot by hiring perpetual screen psycho Bruce Dern to play the unorthodox Doc who's obviously been sequestered in his basement lab too long from the look of his 2-headed petting zoo. All he needs now are a

couple human guinea pigs to share a lab table. Enter a murderous sex maniac (Albert Cole) recently escaped from the Loony Bin, plus Danny, a huge, friendly retarded farmhand—and you know these two were made for each other. When the maniac breaks into Dern's home to molest the bikinied missus (Pat Priest, a.k.a. Marilyn from **THE MUNSTERS**) and is shot in the chest, Dern saves the criminally insane head and sews it onto the body of slow-witted Danny. Good idea, Einstein! "May God forgive us," atones Dern, but most viewers won't, because this is pure rotgut. And once the patient(s) awake from the operation, it gets even worse. The Maniac cackles, bugs out his eyes, and insults his retarded half; Danny keeps protesting all the

anti-social behavior (i.e. killing Lovers' Lane teens); and these two make the most mismatched comedy team since Salome and John the Baptist. The pair eventually hassle some stoned bikers and are chased by a white trash posse, while Dern gets even nuttier—locking his wife in an animal cage when she discovers his obsessions. Besides its deep-dish sleaziness, what's remarkable about this flick is how they don't even try to make the 2-headed dudes look convincing. And speaking of unconvincing, Casey Kasem is onboard as Dern's physician pal, also doubling as the town's disc jockey. This movie is so unapologetically asinine that it's withstood the test of time and, two decades later, is still one of the lousiest pics ever made. Oh, I almost forgot to mention the repellent theme song, "Incredible", sung by Bobbie Boyle. (Ugh.)

THE GIRL WITH THE HUNGRY EYES

(1966). William Rotsler will always hold a soft spot in my heart (and head) for directing one of the most outrageous acid pix of the late '60s, **MANTIS IN LACE** [SC#5]. This earlier work is utter trash, packed with crass exploitation, while lacking the psychedelic dementia of his later, laugh-a-minute epic. Cathy Crowfoot and Vicki Dee star as a pair of lesbian chicks named Kitty and Tiger Cat. The trouble begins when they pick up a male hitchhiker named Tom, and Kitty (who's still unsure about the whole dyke scene) finds herself turned on by the (supposedly) charismatic boytoy. When Kitty 'n' Tom begin sucking on each other's tonsils, Tiger Cat gets jealous and instead of doing anything rash, simply smashes Tom's head in with a big ol' rock. Yeah! One less evil-minded male to pollute the gene pool! Too bad it's mostly downhill after that rousing episode. We get long, excruciatingly dull flashbacks of Kitty and her last boyfriend walking through the forest (you could literally chop out the entire second reel and not lose a damned thing); misty-lensed memories of her first girl/girl encounter; protracted stripteases; endless scenes of Tiger Cat driving around the city looking for Kitty; plus plenty of voiceover narration (thus cutting back on sync-sound costs). And despite all the padding, they could only inflate it to 80 lousy minutes! The only other highlight is a (unintentionally hi-



larious) butch dyke birthday party, which culminates in an orgy of overflowing bosoms and eye-liner overuse. But the rest of the tawdry tale is soaked in sentiment, and Rotsler certainly doesn't paint a very flattering portrait of these lesbian "freaks" and their "sick scene", with Kitty running back to her old hetero ways at the end. As for the scenery, Ms. Dee is quite photogenic, and Rotsler takes every opportunity to showcase her ample talents, especially when she's soaping 'em in the shower. But this flick is never as nasty as you'd hope, with corniness oozing from every sprocket hole. Typical grindhouse T&A fodder, for undiscerning deviants.

THE DEVIL'S WIDOW [a.k.a. TAM LIN] (1972). I wouldn't have given this pretentious smegma a second look if not for Roddy McDowall's name on the director's chair. And after fidgeting through this fiasco, it's no surprise Roddy went back to his Chimp make-up soon afterward. The ad makes it look like some sort of satanic nonsense, but it's actually just tedious melodrama with some trendy British goofiness sprinkled in for flavor. Ava Gardner (looking a very believable 48, despite her puffy, plastic surgery skin tone) plays a millionairess who keeps her palatial estate packed with decadent young deadbeats who sit about like lumps. Ava and boyfriend Ian McShane (20 years her junior) romp about the boudoir, but things get hairy when Ian meets the local Vicar's demure daughter (Stephanie Beacham) and learns the joys of True love (yawn). Of course, grizzled Gardner get jealous, and we discover that all of Ava's previous beaus have died from unexplained accidents. That's the extent of the plot, stretched to 107 minutes. Though I kept hoping Ava would turn into a succubus, or some blood-curdling demon, her spangled muu-muus are the most frightening thing in the film. All of this trash is way too self-serious, but at least Roddy snagged prime talent behind the camera including cinematographer Billy Williams (*WOMEN IN LOVE*), and directs the thing like he knew this was gonna be his one and only chance. McDowall pulls out every possible trick, including gratuitous slow-mo, P.O.V. shots thru Ava's yellow sunglasses, and a freeze frame romantic montage. The final ten minutes gets a tad hallucinogenic (a big snake and some fire—oooh, I'm a-scared!), with McShane attempting to escape Ava's clutches. The supporting cast includes Cyril and Sinead Cusack, and even though Ms. Beacham had already starred in *THE NIGHTCOMERS* and *DRACULA A.D. 1972*, this film boasts of "introducing" her. The cringeable songs are courtesy of the justifiably-forgotten *The Pentangle*, and McDowall sticks in enough annoying Irish folk bellowing to make you wanna kick all his teeth out.

BLOWBACK (1990). This ambitious independent item from director Marc Levin mixes conspiracy theories, undercover spies, personal hygiene, and sexual politics into a delightfully Dr. Strangelovian goulash. Bruce McCarty stars as Owen Monroe, a Bible-thumping, flag-waving, Oliver North-clone who's proud to admit he's never had an orgasm in his life and is willing to do anything to keep the rest of America equally pure. Jane Hamper co-stars as Nancy, a pretty ex-cokehead and present-day nymphomaniac. While working in a Miami rehab center Nancy meets a suicidal ex-operative who rambles about political assassinations, mind control experiments and top

secret files. So of course, since these two are so utterly incompatible—the fanatic and the addict—they end up working together when Owen suspects that his anti-Commie partners are one patty short of a Big Mac. Even more flaked-out is the sinister Dr. Crack, who has a secret lab located in the backroom of a seedy strip joint. There he's programming a brain-washed army of orgasm-powered warriors, based on Wilhelm Reich's orgone theories, in addition to developing the insidious O-Bomb. If the drama gets a little murky, Levin makes up for it with his wide scope of potential targets and scathing episodes. He presents us with a massive tapestry of paranoia, including LSD-controlled assassins, terrorist invasions of the U.S., and drug lords working with the C.I.A. (no, really?). And just wait until you see what happens when Owen and Nancy finally decide to dampen the sheets together...All the performances are solid (a rare treat for indie productions), with Hamper stealing every scene as the tough, sexy heroine with a mouth like a longshoreman. Crammed with imaginative (albeit half-baked) ideas, this pic's twisted sense of humor and subversive edge keep it on track.

THE STORY OF A KIND OF WOMAN FEW PEOPLE KNOW EVEN EXISTS



ECSTATIC STIGMATIC (1980). This hour-long underground flick proudly wears its sledgehammer symbolism like a badge of honor, with director George Stevenson making the most of his extremely limited budget. Pummeling unsuspecting viewers with lots of Catholic imagery and dysfunctional family life, this ambitious 16mm entry also tells a (relatively) coherent story. Utilizing a mock-clinical approach, we're introduced to a mental patient named Rose, played by Mary Kathryn Cervenka (the late, older sister of Exene, lead singer in X). Rose simply lays in her bed, nearly catatonic, paralyzed by her uncontrollable stigmata (as well as her past, which has brought about her current condition). Much of the film has Rose writhing in near orgasm, bleeding from various orifices, and posed on her bed in Christ-like fashion—with her more hysterical states interpreted as some sort of "holy martyrdom". There's substantial erotic tension throughout these scenes, with Stevenson lingering lovingly on the flesh and blood, and his disorient-

ing camerawork giving it the air of a D.T. dream. We're also privy to flashbacks of Rose's childhood, with Mary playing herself as a little girl. Her father enjoys making not-so-subtle advances and fondling her; her mom performs tattoo performance art; and at a tender age she's sexually assaulted by a sleazebag nightclub emcee. Cervenka is a stand-out, bringing raw reality and pathos to her role—it's almost as if she isn't acting—and her commanding presence breathes life into the disjointed tale. It's a home-lensed labor of love, and though Stevenson has a propensity for heavyhanded imagery (including hoary standbys, like a picture of Jesus crying blood) he's less interested in the easy shocks of today's indie filmmakers than in probing the psychology of his character. The pic's wild technical crudeness (flip-flopping between b&w and color stock; hand written end credits) might turn off some, but stick with it, because Stevenson pulls off some truly haunting moments. It's a small, uncut gem.

LITTLE CIGARS (1973). Throughout this misguided drama, I kept asking myself "What type of deranged studio would ever give the green light to this asinine project?" American International Pictures would, that's who! Honestly, would YOU invest money in a movie

featuring a gang of midget crooks and their Snow White-esque gun moll? The only thing it has going for it is the alluring presence of Angel Tompkins (*THE TEACHER*). Director Chris Christenberry and producer Albert Band (well, at least Al went onto other movies) don't give Tompkins much to work with, but the premise is so goofy that it's worth a confused look. It begins when Cleo (Angel) ditched her Mob Boss beau and runs into a travelling troupe of midget con men. While the little guys perform their tired slapstick routines on stage and distract their white trash audiences, the ring leaders loot the cars in the parking lot. Cleo quickly teams up with them, and concocts bigger plans for the entire crew. Rather than continually running from the local Barney Fife, they hit the big time (comparatively)—robbing movie theatres, backroom casinos, and an armored car. Meanwhile, Angel and diminutive Slick (Billy Curtis) begin bedding down together. The entire pic has a Movie of the Week flatness about it, and the PG rating doesn't help matters. Even when it suddenly turns serious (the midgets kill a couple hit men who're after Angel), that peppy sitcom muzak is still laid over every scene. Angel does her best with her cliched ice queen role, but you wish the script had fleshed out the supporting cast a little more—at least give the half-pints a reason for their crimes, like they hate Big People or some other nonsense. Instead, all we get are

lame midget gags (i.e. being carried around inside luggage), and it's virtually unwatchable when the filmmakers try to wring a saccharine romance outta their bar rag of a story. Gimme a fuckin' break! Co-starring Felix Silla (Cousin Itt), this is a tame, lame mess.



THE SWILL AND THE SWELL

Still haven't gotten enough reviews, movie masochists? Well, buckle your seat buckles, because here's the more mainstream flotsam that I don't want to waste half a page on...One of my fave flicks from last year is **ROMPER STOMPER**, a winner from Australia---it's *CLOCKWORK ORANGE* meets *SUBURBIA*. Russell Crowe kicks ass as Hondo, the brooding leader of a pack of Nazi-worshipping punks. The first half features a battle between the gang and vengeful Vietnamese kids---the second half turns into a skinhead love triangle when a cute, abused runaway creates tension between Hondo and right-hand man Davey. Despite a few unexpected turns, it never compromises its rebellious vision...John Duigan's **SIRENS** is a good little arthouse pic that'll make a truckload of money because of four simple words: Elle McPherson Nekkid Alot. I know I'll be wearing out my freeze frame once it hits home video. Hugh Grant plays a staid clergyman who visits a scandalous artist, with him and the missus getting a lesson in lust from Sam Neill and his constantly nude trio of models. Its point might be obvious, but the scenery is lush and the women hot...Roman Polanski's potboiler, **BITTER MOON**, is his best film since *THE TENANT*, with Hugh Grant (once again) playing a prim 'n' proper gent who, while on a cruise ship, runs into a crazy, wheelchair Ugly American (Peter Coyote). During the voyage, Coyote tells Hugh the story of his erotic, perverse, self-destructive relationship with sultry Emmanuelle Seigner---slowly suckering the guy into a series of sexual games. Imagine if Charles Bukowski wrote *RED SHOE DIARIES*. This is terrific trash from a director who understands the subject matter all too well...Auteur/thug Abel Ferrara, the new darling of the Meat Movie genre, had two films (barely) hitting theatres. First is the long completed **BODY SNATCHERS**---Abel's most accessible work. Once again bringing Jack Finney's *Pod People* to the screen, this one's set on an Army Base, and features a gutsy performance from Gabrielle Anwar as a teenager trapped amongst military morons and emotionless, alien duplicates (not much of a difference, eh?). With solid support from Meg Tilly (whose creepy persona comes in useful for once), good tendril FX, a little subtext, and a refreshing lack of stupid humor...In a completely

different vein, Abel's **DANGEROUS GAME** is a seriously fucked up movie that was unjustly fried by critics and moviegoers. Harvey Keitel plays a volatile director shooting an intense pic about a marital breakup---pairing a drunken, unbankable lead actor (James Russo) against a pop starlet who wants to do 'serious' work (a surprisingly competent Madonna). The production boils with a Cassavetes-style edginess and a Ferrera-style psychosis. It's disturbing, pretentious and half-baked, with plenty of not-so-opaque glimpses into Ferrara's own warped state of mind...Dario Argento's **TRAUMA** never made it to U.S. theatres, but at least it hit video uncut (though you could've letterboxed the thing, asswipes). Dario's daughter Asia is effective as a waif on the run from a drug clinic and a madman who specializes in decaps. Argento trades his half-baked surrealism for a more coherent narrative, and though Dario dweebs will complain that he's compromising his vision, they aren't the ones having to pay his bills. I happen think it's one of the most stylish genre pics of the year...Speaking of stylish, Peter Medak's **ROMEO IS BLEEDING** fits that description. But it's also dumb as dirt, with Gary Oldman playing a cop on the take, who gets involved with super-hitwoman Lena Olin. This is a prime example of a movie that thinks it's way cooler than it actually is---targeting its 'cult' audience, then playing down to them. All the characters are stoopid, the action is excessive but unbelievable, and the script is a mess...**HOLD ME, THRILL ME, KISS ME** is a John Waters-wannabee by Joel Hershman (remember that name, so you can avoid any further efforts) that will only appeal to poseurs (Leonard Maltin liked it. 'Nuff said?). I actually paid money to see this trailer park turd in a theatre, mainly because of Adrienne Shelley (*TRUST*)---but when Sean Young is the best thing in a movie, you know you're in trouble. Predictably offensive and totally plastic...Alex Cox's career has been dormant for a spell, but the director of *SID AND NANCY* is back with the atypical **HIGHWAY PATROLMAN**, a Mexico-lensed tale of a novice cop (Roberto Sosa) and his misadventures in the field, such as casual corruption and a friendly prostitute. Influenced by Spaghetti cinema, laced with vaguely comic moments, and acted by unknowns, this is an odd, small-scale treat

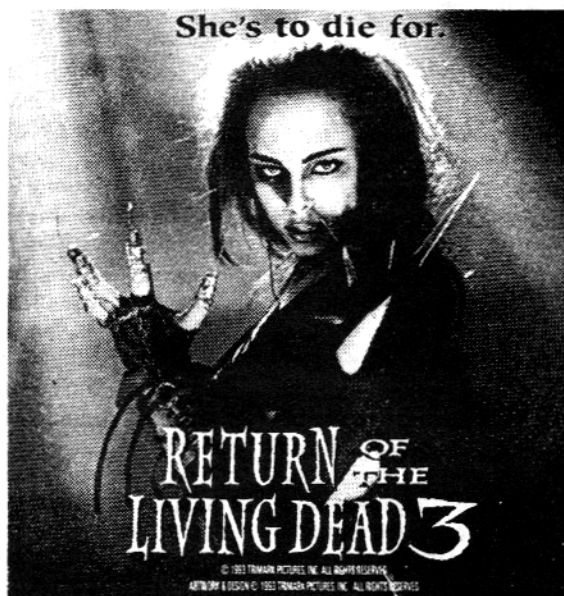
that avoids normal Tinseltown conventions for its own spacey rhythms...In the Dinosaur Movie Sweepstakes, **CARNOSAUR** has Spielberg's cash cow beat in an instant. Where else can you see environmentalists gutted, lizardy fetuses leaping from chicken eggs, and Diane Ladd giving birth to a football-sized dinosaur egg? There's viscera aplenty, and fave-director Adam Simon (**BRAIN DEAD**, **BODY CHEMISTRY 2**) has a keen eye and a sick sense of humor ...**BOXING HELENA** lured me in with the presence of Sherilyn Fenn, who might as well have signed up for **MERIDIAN PART 2** instead. When slutty Sherilyn is hit by a car, obsessed Doc Julian Sands takes her to his home and chops off her arms and legs so she can't escape. Directed by David Lynch's daughter, Jennifer (I guess talent skips a generation), this doesn't even work as trash, because at the end it wimps out and we learn it's all a dream! (Yeah, I gave away the ending. Tough...)...I don't think anybody on the planet saw **TED & VENUS**, a dark, personal project directed and starring Bud Cort. A down-and-out street poet (imagine Harold, the guy Cort played in **HAROLD AND MAUDE**, crossed with Bukowski) falls for a beautiful beach babe, with the viewer pulled into his mad, self-destructive obsession. Loaded with first-time-directing-stumbles, this is nonetheless a draining, embarrassingly-honest ride in romantic dementia (a topic I'm always a sucker for)...On the horror front, the best flick of the year was Brian Yuzna's **RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD 3**. Leaving behind the tired humor of the first two, Yuzna turns this into an undead love story—a Romeo and Juli-Eccchhh for the '90s. Mindy Clarke stars as a teenager who snaps her neck in a cycle accident and is reanimated by her love-blinded beau, using the secret gov't gas from Parts 1&2. She returns from the dead and staves off her hunger pangs by self-mutilating her body with an assortment of glass shards, wires and metal chunks—taking body piercing to its unnatural limits. Thoroughly disgusting FX never overshadow their romantic plight, and the delectable Ms. Clarke will surely be a star if she stops starring in crap like **RETURN TO TWO MOON JUNCTION**...Yuzna knows how to construct a horror romp, and further proof lies in his production of **TICKS**. Directed by Tony Randel, this is a throwback to the '50s Mutant-Species-On-the-Loose outings, featuring your usual cross-section of teen morons trapped in the wilderness when a monsters attack. This time around it's grapefruit-sized ticks who've been lapping up marijuana fertilizer. Though stupid, it works perfectly on a gut level...Lodge Kerrigan's **CLEAN, SHAVEN** garnered

raves in the alternative press. Well, what the fuck do they know? This film was a no-budget disaster, saved only by Peter (LAWS OF GRAVITY) Greene's dead-on portrayal of a schizophrenic searching for his daughter, who was put up for adoption. A superb half-hour character study stretched to feature length by turning it into a pseudo-thriller—making Greene a possible-child murderer with an inane detective on his trail—once again turning mental illness into a movie cliché...Guillermo del Toro's **CRONOS** lived up to its rep—mixing the magical realism of Marquez with a modern-day take on vampires and the undead. Constructed by an alchemist in order to prolong life, the Cronos Device (resembling a hand-sized, golden scarab) falls into the hands of an antique dealer and turns him into a decidedly unterrifying blood-drinker—licking nosebleeds off of bathroom floors and kept from sunlight in his granddaughter's toy chest. Filled with unexpected humor and humanity, plus grim moments that had

arthouse geeks running for the exits...**SUTURE** is an elegantly-lensed thriller, but that doesn't make it good. The story of two nearly-identical brothers—one evil, one good—with the nice one becoming the fall guy for the asshole. Luckily, directors Scott McGehee and David Siegel had the inspired notion to cast a black man (Dennis Haysbert, co-star of the atrocious **LOVE FIELD**) as a white guy's doppelganger, with none of the characters noticing. One clever idea and some stylish set pieces make it worth a look, but I was falling asleep during bits of it...My favorite comedy of last year? **FREAKED**, the outrageous brainchild of Alex Winter and Tom Stern. Winter stars as a rancid teen idol who stumbles across a South American "freakland" run by deranged Randy Quaid, who uses a toxic fertilizer to turn folks into his sideshow menagerie. Alex becomes his star attraction after mutating into a puss-spurting monster, with Mr. T as a bearded lady, Bobcat Goldthwait as the voice of Sock Puppet Man, and Brooke Shields as a vapid celebrity (ooooh, that's a stretch). One of the few films that had me laughing out loud...Mike Leigh's **NAKED** is a scalding portrait of a nihilistic asshole, and David Thewlis deserved the Best Actor Oscar over Tom Hanks (who, if there's any God, will be relegated to starring in **BACHELOR PARTY PART 2** once all his hype has blown over). This is an open sore of a movie, with Thewlis fucking, drinking, arguing, and bleeding his way across London on one particularly gruesome night...Krzysztof Kieslowski's **BLUE** stars Juliette Binoche as a wife who must come to terms with the sudden death of her husband and child. No, it's not a musical. Though a heavygoing, the ethereal Ms. Binoche effortlessly makes up for her embarrassing turn as **DAMAGE**'s object of desire. She holds the

screen hostage, tearing up her past in hopes of rebuilding her future. Another Oscar oversight...The French-Canadian **LEOLO** is a sick little treasure. Featuring a boy who believes his mother was impregnated with an Italian tomato, lives with a family obsessed with bowel movements, plays voyeur with a neighborhood dish, and tries to murder his grandfather by lynching him in the bathroom...Although French director Jacques Rivette is one of the cinema's most cherished treasures, I bet most people will check out his epic-length **LA BELLE NOISEUSE** for only one reason: To watch drop-dead gorgeous Emmanuelle Beart posing naked for nearly four hours as a model for an old fart artist. Oh yeah, the rest of the movie's O.K. too...The Coen Brothers' **THE HUDSUCKER PROXY** is a lot of fun to watch—too bad it has no heart. This ode to Capra and Sturges is another

valentine to film nerds, with shit-meister producer Joel Silver signing the checks and Tim Robbins and Jennifer Jason Leigh copy-cattling Gary Cooper and Katherine Hepburn. Watch **BARTON FINK** again instead...John Waters is back on track with **SERIAL MOM**, a skewering of suburbia, psychosis and media-celebrities. It's great to see Kathleen Turner doing something cool again (instead of forty-something fodder like **UNDERCOVER BLUES**), playing a middle-class mom whose hobbies include filthy phone calls and murder. Though not in league with Waters' early classics, this is a breath of fetid air in comparison to the mainstream shit playing multi-plexes...The best film of last year? Despite the critical kudos (usually a kiss of death), I loved Robert Altman's **SHORT CUTS**—one of the most honest, cynical portraits of romance and relationships to hit the screen. Justice has been done to Raymond Carver's work, and the three-plus hours flew by like a rainy night spent in your favorite barroom.





BOOKS

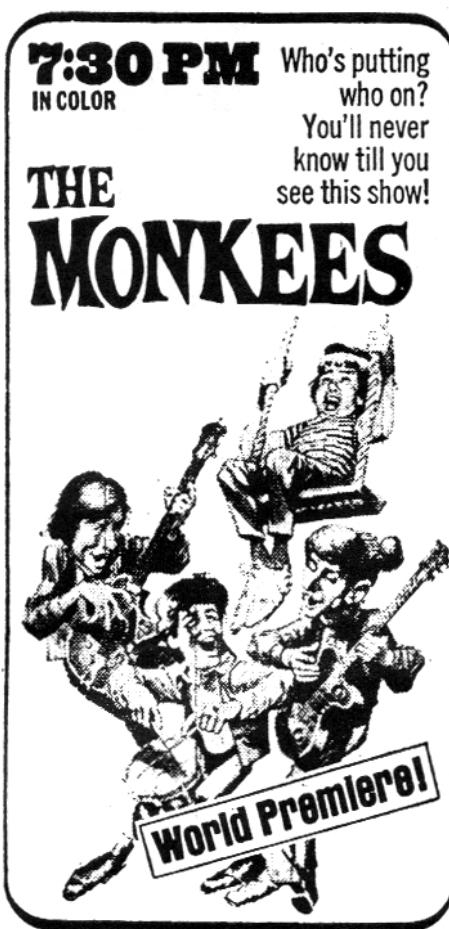
I'M A BELIEVER: MY LIFE OF MONKEES, MUSIC, AND MADNESS by Micky Dolenz and Mark Bego (Hyperion; \$9.95). Just in case you've been unable to sleep at night, wondering what's the true, unexpurgated story of the rise and fall of The Monkees—well, you aren't gonna find it in Micky Dolenz's autobiographical yarn, because he tactfully avoids most of the dirt (though Davy still manages to come off as a pompous troll—a fact we could've guessed all on our own). Still, this is a slight, but entertaining history of one of the most influential forces in '60s mass-media. Not only did they star in one of the most innovative TV series of its time (it even won an Emmy for Best Comedy), but they also cranked out terrific pop music which kept the Pre-Fab Four at the top of the charts (their second album was #1 on the Billboard Listing for 18 straight weeks!), and starred in one of the most lovably hallucinogenic movies of all time, *HEAD*. At least Dolenz kept his sense of humor throughout, freely admitting that the quartet was nothing but "the sixties version of Spinal Tap"...But onto the book. Well, you can almost skip the first third, unless you're desperate for all the standard child star showbiz claptrap—from Micky's starring role in "Circus Boy" at age 8 to post-pubescent unemployment. The book finally kicks into gear with the conception of The Monkees, and Dolenz's reminiscences of their rocket to fame, with Micky suddenly discovering he's unable to go Xmas shopping without getting mobbed by teenage girls. The Monkees phenomenon was HUGE, as were their eventual ego clashes, but how would you react if one day you're an out-of-work actor, and the following year you're hobnobbing out with The Beatles and signing Jimi Hendrix as your opening act while on tour. Too bad Dolenz glosses over little things like excessive drug use and sexual antics, while only touching upon the depression when the "Monkee Express" finally ground to a halt. My favorite portion is when Dolenz began carousing with besotted partyhounds Harry Nilsson and Brian Wilson—and ended up sitting in the middle of the street with a bottle of Scotch, waiting to be hit by a car (sounds like a few of my own evenings). Overall, this is a quick, two hour read, and though Micky's smarmy, inspirational tone wears thin after awhile, he still has a lot of good stories under his belt.

LIFE IS HOT IN CRACKTOWN by Buddy Giovinazzo (Thunder's Mouth Press; \$19.95). This book is a two ton dose of sleaze-drenched reality, squeezed between two covers. A short, powerful, gutter-eye view of New York City from author Buddy Giovinazzo, best known to cinema deviants as the director of the indelible *COMBAT SHOCK* (a.k.a. *AMERICAN NIGHTMARE*). And like that celluloid

vision of pain and squalor, this collection of short stories is a trip through an emotional slaughterhouse that leaves no survivors and offers no false sympathy—its setting is a city where God is dead and hope rests eternal at the end of a crack pipe. Meet Londa, a knocked up crackwhore who gives broken-toothed blowjobs in exchange for some rock, and Daddy, her abusive, drunken beau. There's Miss Lonely, a worn-out prostitute reliving her past as she heads toward a rendezvous with her latest john. And Chuckie, a homeless casualty who blasts away in alleys and dreams of his one great, lost love. Plus there are suburban housewives dipping into the Christmas Fund for their weekly drive into Cracktown, children learning the rules of the street before they learn how to read, and all the other everyday occurrences in this urban cesspool. Giovinazzo's strengths lie in his savage, unflinching viewpoint and his all-too-real characters—whether it takes 40 pages to tell their story, or just four lines. Though wimpier readers might overdose on the curdled melodrama, it always rings true, with Buddy occasionally striving for a Selby-esque rhythm, particularly during a few scream-of-consciousness sections. This is a solid, harsh book that'll echo in your head for days—perfect bedtime reading. And though the burnt-out characters might seem a world away at first, after a while you realize how much we all have in common with them. Because like it or not, we're all alone, we're all a bit lost, and we're all in search—of an easy high.

OBSESSION: THE FILMS OF JESS FRANCO by Lucas Balbo, Peter Blumenstock, Christian Kessler, Tim Lucas. This beautiful, coffee table hardcover is devoted to the wide-ranging career of Spanish director Jess Franco, one of the most prolific, alternately underrated/overrated filmmakers of our time. Over half the book

(150 pages) is given to his extensive filmography (over 150 movies!), complete with credits, plot synopsis, and critical evaluations. But what makes the book ultimately disappointing is that Franco himself had so little to do with it—in fact, the lone interview with Jess takes up only five pages of text. Nevertheless, the volume's strength lies in charting his ever-mutating celluloid endeavors—from stylish thrillers, to bizarre psycho-dramas, to his renowned erotic exploitation tales. Though low on insight into his art and technique, at the very least this is a good reference guide and a loving tribute, as well as the only book about Franco currently on the market. Packed with lurid photos, foreign ad slicks, and interviews with Franco-acting-vets Howard Vernon, Jack Taylor and William Berger, it's certainly worth a look for fans, despite some glaring omissions.



SHOCK XPRESS 2: The Essential Guide to Exploitation Cinema. Edited by Stefan Jaworzyn. (Titan Books). First published in the '80s in magazine form, SHOCK XPRESS was a favorite---mixing celluloid horror and exploitation into a potent combo. Nowadays, editor Jaworzyn releases it as a beautiful, perfect-bound book that'll take you days to ingest. Volume Two fills 128 pages with info that'll delight even the most jaded, hardcore sleaze fan, dredging the cesspools of cinema for the lost and forgotten, while pulling together some of the best writers in the field. This volume is filled with lengthy, insightful articles including a retrospect on the films of Walerian Borowczyk, western anti-hero Django, B-movie hack Jean Yarbrough, plus Jack Stevenson's profile of groundbreaking Swedish beastiality starlet Bodil Joensen. And let's not forget the hundreds of rare photos and ad slicks sprinkled throughout. This superb volume is a must-have---covering the most obscure, cutting edge of cult cinema with both humor and intelligence. One of the very best.



"Perhaps the supreme jerk off film of all time" -HIGH CAMP

HIGH CAMP: A GAY GUIDE TO CAMP AND CULT FILMS VOLUME ONE by Paul Roen (Leyland Publications, P.O. Box 410690, San Francisco, CA 94141; \$15.95). Though titled and targeted specifically toward a queer audience, this book is wildly accessible to any moviegoer interested in truly weird cinema. I loved it. With Carmen Miranda plastered on the cover, we're immediately clued into some of the obvious stops, but Roen also hits all the bases---ranging from CAN'T STOP THE MUSIC and BLACK LIZARD, to MANDINGO, BLOODY PIT OF HORROR and the Mexploitation DOCTOR OF DOOM. This handy guide to cinematic perversity features lengthy descriptions of over 150 camp classics and kitsch-to-be as seen through Roen's distinctive gaze. The result is both informative and entertaining as hell. Take, for example, Roen's take on the gay subtext in THE ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN MARVEL: "An effeminate wimp...is able to transform himself into a studly, macho dude, draped in the inevitable superhero drag (cape, tights; the usual fairy suit)." Roen also gets to hype personal faves, like '50s B-movie hunk John Ashley ("I like his bedroom eyes and bullet-proof pompadour."), plus there's a virtual tidal wave of Bette Davis, Mae West, Joan Crawford, John Waters, Paul Morrissey, and (of course) Italian gladiator movies. I particularly appreciated the fact that every gay-themed piece of swill isn't automatically elevated to Goddesshood (i.e. STAIRCASE, featuring Richard Burton and Rex Harrison as a pair of old fags, is "chillingly squalid...a pathetic exercise"). This is an essential guide to celluloid camp, and Paul Roen has a witty, ingratiating style that lets his writing stand on its own.

THE CONNOISSEUR'S GUIDE TO THE CONTEMPORARY HORROR FILM by Chas. Balun. (Fantaco Books; \$7.95). This slim, 64-page digest from horror/gore aficionado Chas. Balun is a good beginner's guide for schlock neophytes---compiling short, enthusiastically-written reviews for approximately 100 must-see movies. Much of it is the same old shit we've read about time and time again (THE EXORCIST, DAWN OF THE DEAD, et cetera), but Balun pulls a few obscure winners out of his twisted brainpan, such as NIGHT WARNING and THE BOOGENS. Though tame for most long-term horrormavens, Balun transfers his love and respect for the genre onto the page, with a crisp, gonzo writing style that poured the foundation for a generation of 'zine writers.

ASIAN TRASH CINEMA: THE BOOK by Thomas Weisser (Available from VIDEO SEARCH OF MIAMI, P.O. Box 16-1917, Miami, FL 33186; \$19.95 + \$2.90 shipping). Now that Hong Kong cinema is all the rage, this 188-page digest is essential for any fans of the genre. An A-to-Z guide that covers hundreds of the best and worst, with capsule comments and a 1-to-4 star rating system that makes digging thru Chinatown video stores much easier. A solid stepping stone, though not exactly the "definitive" volume it promotes itself as. Weisser's taste runs toward the trashier edges (if it doesn't have gunfights or monsters or weird sex, he finds it boring), while missing the subtext of much of it. Nonetheless, this is a fine reference guide from which to begin digging up these outstanding pics.

MUSIC

THRUST me, Baby! by Mike Schafer.

Peep booths, blow pops, candy wrappers on condoms boldly displaying the THRUST logo. These play, ney, revel in performance. Glowing in black leather and '70s platform heels, sounding like a wrecked train pulled backwards in vibrato. Coal smoke and make-up are all Amy is wearing above the navel. Snort some more booze, start moving to the music. Now people are looking at Anna and me funny because we're dancing to seriously wicked female performance art cum wall of sound in a Coney Island Freak Show, and we must not be taking the "piece" seriously if we're dancing. I mean, how will we be able to discuss how shocked or unshocked we were at the trendy coffee shops in the rich sections of the almost dangerous lower east side?...Kelly's the leader. Once I met her in my local "Compare" supermarket, trying to buy beer on a Sunday morning. I sent her to a bodega and she asked me to be in her video. She promised buckets of Bud and lots of near naked girls. Where were all the near naked girls? In the dressing room? Where was Kelly dragging me? To the dressing room. Kelly had me try on a whole selection of her seventies collection, before opting for a torn white cotton lace nightgown, engineer boots, bonnet, black lip stick, and white pancake make-up on all my exposed areas...At first I thought that Amy, with only make-up for a blouse, liked me. She was the only THRUST member who whipped me really hard, or bounced that plastic bone off my head with vigor. Spunk, that's what that girl has! But, when she followed me into the john, and pee'd next to me, I knew she just thought of me as one of the girls. Sigh...The thing fell apart in a screaming fit when one chick thought there were too many men in women's clothing on stage (they dare criticize my beauty!). Her rants about being a bastion of female power weren't even tolerated. Time to stumble downstairs and grab my clothes before all the girls change and I miss everything. At least Kelly kept her promise, and got me drunk...These girls don't rely on the power of pussy to bring entertainment to them, naw, they're twat rockers who trample young boyflesh most pleasurably.

'ZINES and film-related PUBLICATIONS

Following is a list of assorted titles which I read on a regular basis. All are recommended, and each address is followed by a code designating its format: (M) magazine, (D) Digest, (N) Newsletter, followed by the number of pages and price. You may notice that several mags are missing from the list---that's primarily because the editors make me actually buy a copy on the newsstand..So why should I give 'em a free plug?

BRUCE ON A STICK
P.O. Box 416
Tarrytown, NY 10591
(M;16pgs. \$3)

CINERAIDER
c/o Richard Akiyama
P.O. Box 240226
Honolulu, HI 96824-0226
(D;54pgs. \$4)

**CHILDREN OF A
FAR GREATER GOD**
2nd Floor
221 Ashmore Rd.
Queens Park
London W9 3DB
England
(D;28pgs. \$4)

ECCO
c/o Kill-Gore Productions
P.O. Box 65742
Washington, D.C. 20035
(M;36pgs. \$12/4 issues)

ESSENTIAL CINEMA
2011 Fifth Ave. #301
Seattle, WA 98121-2502
(M;36pgs. \$3.75)

EXPLOITATION RETROSPECT
P.O. Box 1155
Haddonfield, NJ 08033-0708
(D;24pgs. \$1.75)

FILM THREAT VIDEO GUIDE
P.O. Box 3170
Los Angeles, CA 90078-3170
(M;92pgs. \$12 for 4 issues)

FILMMAKER
132 W. 21st St. 6th floor
New York, NY 10011
(M;68pgs. \$4.50)

GORE GAZETTE
c/o Rick Sullivan
643 Bloomfield Ave.
Nutley, NJ 07110
(N;16pgs. \$13/12 issues)

GRINDHOUSE
c/o J. Adler
P.O. Box 1370
Murray Hill Station
New York, NY 10156
(N;6pgs. \$7/6 issues)

HEADPRESS
P.O. Box 160
Stockport, Cheshire
SK1 4ET
Great Britain
(M;64pgs. \$7)

THE JOE BOB REPORT
P.O. Box 2002
Dallas, TX 75221
(N;16pgs. Send name and address for
a free issue)

PSYCHOTIC REACTION
50 Wingfield Road
Great Barr
Birmingham B42 2QD
United Kingdom
(M;48pgs. \$5.50)

SAMHAIN
77 Exeter Road
Topsham, Exeter
Devon EX3 0LX
England
(M;40pgs. \$20/5 issues)

SHEMP!
c/o Larry Yoshida
1919 Evergreen Park Dr. SW Apt. 79
Olympia, WA 98502
(N;6pgs. Free w/SASE)

STICKY CARPET DIGEST
163 Third Ave. Suite 235
New York, NY 10003
(N;20pgs. \$1.50)

WET PAINT
c/o Jeff Smith
4034 Esters Rd. #2031
Irving, TX 75038
(M;24pgs. \$3)

VIDEO DISTRIBUTORS

Hey, you lazy bastards! Get off your ass and order some of the videos you've been reading about! Many of the most obscure titles are available through the places listed below. Some are legitimate businesses, others are "bootlegging scumbags", but I'll let you decide who you want to do business with. Send for their catalogs NOW, or it's your loss.

BLACKEST HEART VIDEO
c/o Shawn Smith
1275 Washington Ave. STE.360
San Leandro, CA 94577

FACETS VIDEO
1517 W. Fullerton Ave.
Chicago, IL 60614

FILM THREAT VIDEO
P.O. Box 3170
Los Angeles, CA 90078-3170

GORE GAZETTE
c/o Rick Sullivan
643 Bloomfield Ave.
Nutley, NJ 07110

MIDNIGHT VIDEO
5010 Church Drive
Coplay, PA 18037

NIGHTMARE PRODUCTIONS
8243 First Avenue South
Bloomington, MN 55420

PAGODA VIDEO
c/o Gary Nigoghossian
2 Holworthy Ter.
Cambridge, MA 02138

SINISTER CINEMA
P.O. Box 4369
Medford, OR 97501-0168

SOMETHING WEIRD VIDEO
P.O. Box 33664
Seattle, WA 98133

VIDEO OYSTER
62 Pearl Street
New York, NY 10004

VIDEO SEARCH OF MIAMI
P.O. Box 16-1917
Miami, FL 33116-1917



GODZILLA RUINED MY MARRIAGE, SAYS FUMING BRIDE!

MARRIAGE lasted only eight hours, says angry bride Jana Giurek.



LATE night *Godzilla* flick turned newlywed couple's wedding night into a nightmare.

By **REGGIE STARR**
Special correspondent

Newlywed Jana Giurek says her marriage went on the rocks only eight hours after she took her vows — because of the movie monster *Godzilla*!

The 18-year-old said she and her husband Leon got in an argument on their wedding night in a hotel just outside Rockford, Ill., when *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster* appeared on late night TV and her groom wanted to watch it.

She told a civil court judge that she wouldn't let Leon turn on the tube, so he left in a rage and never returned. When he sued for divorce four days after the wedding, she countersued claiming cruelty.

"Leon swore he loved me and would cherish me always, then he let some stupid Japanese horror film come between us," the sobbing secretary testified in court. "He humiliated me, he abandoned me. He never gave our marriage a chance."

Giurek, 29, refused to discuss his divorce action with reporters, but his attorney said his client was determined to end the marriage.

"He feels he should not be dictated to by his wife," the lawyer told reporters.

"He has no intention of put-

Jana and Leon, in happier days.



GROOM Leon Giurek preferred *Godzilla* to his new bride.

Groom DUMPS her — after she turns off TV monster flick

ting up with that. Leon saw what he was in for and got out as quick as he could."

According to court documents, Jana and Leon were married in Chicago in an elaborate Catholic ceremony on August 29. The couple traveled to Rockford for their honeymoon. They arrived at their hotel, checked into the bridal suite and ordered a room service dinner for two.

After a meal with two bottles of champagne, the couple prepared for bed.

But while Jana was putting the finishing touches on her wedding night outfit, Giurek started reading the television

guide — and *Godzilla* put the kabosh on romance. "I came out of the bathroom in my beautiful negligee and Leon was tickled pink because his favorite movie was going to be on the late show."

"He ordered coffee so he could stay awake. He forgot all about me. That jerk didn't even notice I was there."

Jana said she became furious and pulled the channel knob off the television set. Leon, equally angry, packed his

bags and left. "Now I want justice," angry Jana said. "I want him to repay me for the damage he has done to me emotionally. It's bad enough when your husband abandons you over another woman."

"This man left me for a TV monster on the most important night of my life and I want him to pay for his cruelty."

According to press accounts, the couple have been living apart since their disastrous honeymoon.

FLYING PIG SHOCKER!

JAKARTA, Indonesia — A shocked motorist reported to authorities that his car was pelted by manure pellets from a swarm of flying pigs.

Timothy Carey - Lucio Fulci - Werner Herzog - Sammy Davis Jr. - G.G. Allin - Andy Warhol
Paul Bartel - David Cronenberg - Doris Wishman - Joe Sarno - Andy Griffith - Nick Cave
Gary Burghoff - Charles Pinion - Andy Milligan - Danny Bonaduce - Bruno Ganz - Bob Dylan
Yutte Stensgaard - Anton LaVey - Lenny Bruce - Marianne Faithfull - Bruce Dern
Jess Franco - Mario Bava - Larry Cohen - Joe Christ - Ray Dennis Steckler - The Monkees